Collaborative Evaluation & Research Centre

Supporting Innovative Research and Evaluation

EVALUATION OF THE NEW WAVE GIPPSLAND CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

EVALUATION 2023 - 2024

FEDERATION UNIVERSITY

COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION & RESEARCH CENTRE

SUPPORTING INNOVATIVE RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

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NEW WAVE GIPPSLAND
CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT
2023 - 2024

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The Collaborative Evaluation & Research Centre (CERC) Federation University Gippsland is an innovative initiative that aims to build evaluation capacity and expertise locally in Gippsland, and nationally and internationally. As a local provider in Gippsland, Victoria, the CERC understands the value of listening to the community and has the ability to deliver timely and sustainable evaluations that are tailored to the needs of a wide variety of organisations.

Professor Joanne Porter is the Director of the CERC. She has led several successful research projects and evaluations in conjunction with local industry partners and has guided the CERC's development since its formation in 2018.

The team that evaluated the New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project included:

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CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Funded by the Australian Government National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant, the New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project aimed to build capacity and develop skills, knowledge, and abilities of people with an intellectual disability, acquired brain injury (ABI) or complex communication in the Gippsland region.

The key element of this project was the engagement, training, and support of Peer Educators in developing and delivering the Sexual Lives & Respectful Relationships (SL&RR) program and network in Gippsland. It also aimed to engage with community professionals from the sexual assault, community development and advocacy sectors to participate in violence and abuse prevention and respectful relationships education, training, and community work.

SL&RR is an ecological model of violence and abuse prevention that has people with an intellectual disability at the centre. It utilises a community development approach that works from the individual out to society and systems that impact the experiences of safety and well-being in relationships and communities. The model has been co-developed by people with intellectual disabilities and is co-facilitated by people with intellectual disabilities in partnership with community professionals in the sexual assault sector.

The SL&RR model provided the opportunity for GCASA to engage in dialogue with people with an intellectual disability, ABI, or complex communication, who are impacted significantly by sexual violence to contribute to the knowledge of people with intellectual disabilities around their rights to relationships which are free from violence.

To coordinate the SL&RR program and support New Wave Gippsland (NWG), a Project Coordinator and a Program Developer were appointed. To deliver the program, employment opportunities for self-advocates to deliver education and build community capacity in relation to disability awareness were provided.

The program aimed to undertake the following activities:

- Build the capacity of the Gippsland SL&RR network to engage with people with an intellectual disability, ABI, LGBTIQA+ people with disability, community health and sexual assault professionals and services across a wider scope in Gippsland.
- Deliver the SL&RR program including the new ABI and LGBTIQ+ programs, in Central and East Gippsland
- Promote the Gippsland SL&RR network through free information / professional development sessions for the health, community, and disability sectors. Conduct sessions and engage Peer Educators as co-presenters.
- Increase social and economic participation by Peer Educators/self-advocates employed through NWG and include paid work for up to 12 Peer Educators.

Project Coordinators, counsellors and Peer Educators provided a robust team to support the SL&RR network and implementation of the model across Gippsland.

KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

When exploring outcomes for Phase 2 of the project, quantitative data gathered for the project reach and impact suggested that there was a significant increase in numerical outputs in the information sessions/workshops/Café Catch-Ups facilitated, and a modest increase in the number of program participants involved in the SL&RR program:

- The total number of the SL&RR program participants rose from 30 People with Intellectual Disability in Phase 1, to 44 in Phase 2.
- The combined number of participants attending Café Catch-Up events and information sessions went from 479 people in Phase 1, to 869 people in Phase 2.

The Program Developer discussed how the SL&RR program had evolved over the years of operation, reflecting on how, and where it started, to where it was now. The developer could see the immense changes that had occurred in all staff involved, including the Peer Educators and themselves, plus how the focus of the program delivery had evolved during this time:

> "*The focus of the program and our key messaging has changed now to, if they* [program participants] *walk away understanding that consent is a choice and can be changed anytime and that you have the right to make decisions as long as you're thinking about is it a free decision? Do you understand all the possibilities and is it going to cause harm to you or someone else? They're the things I want them to take away*". (Program Staff)

In Phase 2 of the project, data received from GCASA project staff demonstrated that approximately 913 people were reached, including SL&RR program participants, stakeholders, organisations, network members, current and prospective GCASA staff, health professionals, family members and carers. This demonstrated a 36.2% increase in program reach in 2023-2024 compared to 2020-2022, despite the COVID-19 restrictions impacting the team's ability to travel to and run in person events.

Phase 2 of the project continued to demonstrate the positive impact the SL&RR program was having on participants with an intellectual disability. During interview sessions with participants, learning how to be safe was repeatedly cited as key to the program and expressed by program participants in different ways. Understanding sexual harassment as part of learning how to be safe was well captured in the narratives of participants when asked why they came to this SL&RR program:

> "*We wanted to do it* [the SL&RR program] *because we wanted to do a special and different learning about sexual harassment. And we wanted to learn what we can do to make us feel safe, and the wrong things we can't do* [unsafe ways]*. So, we know the difference between right and wrong*". (Program Participant)

The participants outlined how some topics covered in this SL&RR program were sometimes challenging, at times making them feel uncomfortable. Nevertheless, the feelings of uncomfortableness were reduced by their participation in the discussions encouraged by the program:

> "*I think some of the topics have been tough, but that's important because it promotes discussion and further thoughts on why we're uncomfortable and why we need to be learning these things*". (Program Participant)

Some participants discussed how they had applied what they had learned in their real-life, "*I think it was last week that I spoke up about what happened to me*". Furthermore, one participant outlined

that what they learned from the program would be useful for them in the future, as they were ready to deal with any potential unwanted behaviour that could occur:

> *"I think to me it's good because in the future it* [unwanted or non-consensual behaviour] *might happen to us. And we're going to be prepared to protect ourselves".* (Program Participant)

Program participants also highlighted during interview sessions that the presence of the Peer Educators in the education sessions was valuable in several ways, including making them feel good, allowing them to learn about their childhood stories, bringing them together, and allowing them to feel safe sharing their stories. Participants outlined seeing the Peer Educators as people with similar life experiences. With their lived experience, the Peer Educators understood the participants' feelings, *"not everyone's situation is the same, but at least it feels good that someone else is like us".* (Program Participant).

Making friends/networking was another positive aspect of the SL&RR program raised by the participants. They appreciated the opportunity to discuss things and listen to one another, *"it really helped us and my friends. It seems like we can talk more with friends; we just talk and listen to each other, and that's good".* (Program Participant). This opportunity enabled the participants to learn from one another. As one participant explained, *"We like to learn new things and learn about other people who have disabilities like us and also have those challenges."* They learned from one another through story-sharing in a safe space:

> *"Spending more time sharing all my lovely stories and stuff with everybody, and everybody has their turns of speaking friendly. What says in this room, it doesn't leave. And that's the beauty of it, I reckon".* (Program Participant).

Experiences provided by the Peer Educators during interview sessions emphasised the importance of *"having a voice and being heard,"* which was essential for themselves and the program participants with intellectual disabilities. They achieved this by participating in delivering program sessions, which created an empowering environment for the participants to have their voices heard. The ability of self-advocacy Peer Educators gained through program facilitation was transferable beyond the program:

> *"I've learned to stand up a little bit more for myself, my boundaries. I am becoming more confident in expressing what I do know. And even why I know it. Let's just say I feel like I've gone from kindergarten to year ten straight away".* (Peer Educator)

The Peer Educators also discussed their happiness and enjoyment in teaching participants with intellectual disabilities, and their feeling supported in their roles. Their subjective feeling of contribution to the community of people with intellectual disabilities through this Peer Educator role motivated them to continue this work in the future:

> *"It was only that moment that made me open my eyes. And yeah, I'm not gonna stop because I'm happy to help anyone and support anyone through what they're going through".* (Peer Educator)

In seeing the numerous benefits of being a Peer Educator in the SL&RR program, they encouraged other people with lived experience to also take up the role. Their motivating comments for any new Peer Educators were around *"be yourself"*, *"don't be afraid, just speak up"*, and that they would be *"surrounded by some amazing people"* in the program.

In the SL&RR program feedback survey, stakeholder participants were asked "*what are the three most important things you learnt today?",* providing open-ended responses to this question. Results generated that stakeholders' awareness of programs, support and/or resources for young people and people with disabilities and/or experiencing sexual assault was one of the most important things they learnt from the program. As one participant stated, "[It was] *resources for practitioners working with individuals experiencing sexual violence*". Another said, "[It was] *programs and "resources that I didn't know existed*". One participant stated, "[It was] *services for disabilities and sexual assault*".

Survey responses from stakeholders demonstrated increased understanding of sexual lives and respectful relationships of their clients from participating in the program, realising that the program content was vital to support their program participant clients. Responses suggested that stakeholders learnt from program resources and were motivated to provide sustainable support that was safe and inclusive. Furthermore, findings suggested that a gap was evident in the current knowledge stakeholders held in regard to content delivered in the SL&RR program, outlining the need for greater information sharing, transparency and education to be provided in this space.

During interview sessions, the Program Developer outlined the challenges they experienced in biases from organisations outside of the program that may have impacted support provided. They discussed the challenges in managing relationships with "*project partners"* and "*network*" members, as there was "*such an imbalance of comprehension and questions and need*". The challenges as times manifested through organisations and/or family "*blocking*" clients from accessing the program:

> *"There's been times where organisations have initially expressed interest but when they get to know the kind of information that we deliver, they're own bias kick in and, even distributing this information, peoples and organisations biases can actually get in the way of reaching the vulnerable people that we need to reach".* (Program Staff)

The SL&RR sessions were capped to small numbers to ensure the safety of the participants and staff. Workshop participants discussed the perceived limited accessibility of People with an Intellectual Disability to support services. Participants believed that a degree of 'gatekeeping' was being witnessed, whereby delivery of the SL&RR program content to People with Intellectual Disability would "*open up too much of a can of worms*" for service providers and/or parents, guardians, and carers.

Workshop participants also highlighted the lack of education and limited awareness of the program content and its implications within medical practitioners, health-related providers, and institutions working with women. It was identified that this lack of understanding may have contributed to biases and potential coercive control. These findings were further confirmed during interview sessions with project participants, who outlined that *"fear of the unknown"* among the parents or carers was identified as one of the primary reasons prohibiting the program to reach out to the participants.

When discussing the physical program resources such as the manual and the educational videos, the program facilitator highlighted how the manual needed to be "*visual*" and that it needed to be "*a bit more user friendly and a bit more useful*". They discussed the inclusion of links to the course videos "*so people can go back and watch them themselves… And have more appropriate content and language in those videos stories*". Consideration into how adults learn and ways to "*accommodate all those different learning styles and capacities*" was also discussed, demonstrating how not one manual, video or course delivery style would suit all participants, with the need to be flexible in delivery and content available.

In addition to the program content and appropriate language, educational materials, specifically videos, were highlighted as main contributors to the right pitch for the program. The Peer Educators believed that videos were important for the program, with some suggesting cutting them shorter into "*bite-sized chunks*". When asked what the ideal length of each video was, one participant responded:

> "*Maybe like four or five minutes? They haven't changed much since they first created the videos in terms of teaching it to the participants. I think we need to really think and get the teaching of the different elements, actually like breaking it down into bite-sized chunks rather than one big, long video to talk about that video just by itself*". (Peer Educator)

Finally, the SR&RR program was a collaborative project between the New Wave Gippsland and the GCASA. Many of the Peer Educators who co-facilitated the SL&RR program with GCASA's staff came from the New Wave Gippsland (NWG). These Peer Educators reflected that the different organisational structures between these two organisations created some challenges for NWG to lead the SL&RR program. They discussed how the relatively flattened structure of NWG was not conducive to how the SL&RR program was run. There was no top-down management leading and/or setting priorities for New Wave Gippsland, meaning that the members were relatively equal and directed priorities with support from project workers.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a total of six identified recommendations for the New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project. The following recommendations are based on the findings of this report. For a detailed summary of recommendations, see report subsection 9.1 "*Recommendations*":

1. Continue to **facilitate the SL&RR program through GCASA**, as they are the ideal lead agency to deliver the PREP program.
2. Consider **rebranding and revising the SL&RR program**. This rebranding and revision should be done in a collaboration with GCASA program staff and the Peer Educators, drawing on all relevant data sets in this evaluation.
3. Continue **delivering the SL&RR program using a collaborative approach between GCASA staff and Peer Educators.**
4. Provide ongoing **support and training for all SL&RR program staff.**
5. Continue to **work with key stakeholders/ agencies towards a shared vision and purpose** and **build program awareness and reach.**
6. Continue to **deliver the SL&RR program to small groups** across Gippsland, **maintaining a 'participant centered approach'** and trauma aware approach.

EVALUATION OF NEW WAVE GIPPSLAND CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT
JANUARY 2023- JUNE 2024

44 people with intellectual disabilities (PWID) attended the SL&RR program

390 people attended Cafe Catch-Ups, with 57 PWID

479 people attended information sessions, with 72 PWID

The **Sexual Lives and Respectful Relationships (SL&RR)** program is an ecological model of violence and abuse prevention that has people with an intellectual disability at the centre.

Evaluation sources

1. Focus group with 3 peer educators.
3. Reflection workshops.
3. Interviews with program team.
4. Focus groups with 21 program participants.
5. Interviews with peer educators.
25. Program participants completed a survey questionnaire.
58. Stakeholder participants completed a survey questionnaire.

SL&RR participant survey feedback

Will you use what you learnt today?

	Yes	No	Don't know

Program Participants: Learnt how to be safe, made friends, and want to do program again

"It really helped us and my friends... we can talk more with friends; we just talk and listen to each other, that's good." (Participant)

Peer Educators: Had a voice and being heard led to confidence and a sense of fulfillment

"It's really fun... I really enjoy teaching that because I think I'm getting something out of it, and I hope that they have learnt from it." (Peer Educator)

Stakeholder Participants: Being aware of support and resources; learning from lived experiences and about inclusiveness and the importance of avoiding assumptions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to **facilitate SL&RR program through GCASA**, ideal lead agency to deliver the program.
2. Consider **rebranding and revising SL&RR program**. Done in a collaboration with GCASA program staff and the Peer Educators.
3. Continue **delivering SL&RR program using a collaborative approach** between GCASA staff and Peer Educators.
4. Provide **ongoing support and training** for all SL&RR program staff.
5. Continue to **work with key stakeholders/ agencies** towards a shared vision and mission, building program awareness and reach.
6. Continue to deliver SL&RR program to small groups across Gippsland, **maintaining a 'participant centered approach'**.

2. NEW WAVE GIPPSLAND CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

> *"I'm working on an educational project with and for people with disabilities to make them feel safe in environments that they may not necessarily feel safe in, to be treated the same as everyone else, and to be able to speak up and have a say."*
>
> *Peer Support Worker, New Wave Gippsland*

Funded by the Australian Government National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant, the New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project aimed to build capacity and develop skills, knowledge and abilities of people with an intellectual disability, acquired brain injury (ABI) or complex communication in the Gippsland region. The ILC grant was funded for two types of activity:

- Individual Capacity Building (ICB) activities that build the capacity of people with a disability by ensuring that they have the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to set and achieve their goals.
- Organisation Capacity Building (OCB) activities that improve the ability of organisations to deliver their organisation mission and deliver ILC in the community.

New Wave Gippsland (NWG) delivered the project with the support of the Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault (GCASA). The project was auspiced by GCASA.

NWG is a self-advocacy group for Gippsland residents with intellectual disability, ABI, or complex communication issues. It has been operating for 12 years and is based in Morwell, with satellite operations in Leongatha and Wonthaggi. NWG employs two support workers and has four paid roles for self-advocate leaders and peer support workers.

The key element of this project was the engagement, training and support of Peer Educators in developing and delivering the Sexual Lives & Respectful Relationships (SL&RR) network in Gippsland. It also aimed to engage with community professionals from the sexual assault, community development and advocacy sectors to participate in violence and abuse prevention and respectful relationships education, training, and community work.

Sexual Lives & Respectful Relationships (SL&RR)

SL&RR is an ecological model of violence and abuse prevention that has people with an intellectual disability at the centre. It utilises a community development approach that works from the individual out to society and systems that impact the experiences of safety and well-being in relationships and communities. The model has been co-developed by people with intellectual disabilities and is co-facilitated by people with intellectual disabilities in partnership with community professionals in the sexual assault sector.

The SL&RR model provided the opportunity for GCASA to engage in dialogue with people with an intellectual disability, ABI, or complex communication, who are impacted significantly by sexual violence, to contribute to the knowledge of people with intellectual disabilities regarding their rights to relationships which are free from violence.

SL&RR Network

SL&RR is a primary prevention model that aims to stop violence before it occurs through building a network of people, sector professionals and organisations who are motivated and dedicated to building the confidence of their peers with a disability. NWG collaborated with GCASA, Gippsland Disability Advocacy Inc. (GDAI) and sector partners to build the capacity of the Gippsland SL&RR network to outer Gippsland and reach a larger group of people with disabilities and community organisations.

Organisation Capacity Building

To build the organisational capacity of NWG, GCASA worked with the self-advocate leaders, self-advocates, and support workers to:

- Determine skill and leadership development needs of self-advocates and develop/deliver a program of training and support to address these needs, e.g., governance skills and practice.
- Investigate the preferred organisational model for NWG, e.g., incorporated organisation status and resources in implementing this decision.

2.2 PROGRAM DELIVERY / ACTIVITIES

A project coordinator and program developer were appointed to coordinate the SL&RR program and support NWG. To deliver the program, employment opportunities for self-advocates to deliver education and build community capacity regarding disability awareness were provided.

The program aimed to undertake the following activities:

- Build the capacity of the Gippsland SL&RR network to engage with people with an intellectual disability, ABI, LGBTIQA+ people with disability, community health and sexual assault professionals and services across a wider scope in Gippsland.
- Deliver the SL&RR program including the new ABI and LGBTIQ+ programs, in Central and East Gippsland
- Promote the Gippsland SL&RR network through free information / professional development sessions for the health, community, and disability sectors. Conduct sessions and engage Peer Educators as co-presenters.
- Increase social and economic participation by Peer Educators/self-advocates employed through NWG, including paid work for up to 12 Peer Educators.

Project Coordinators, counsellors and Peer Educators provided a robust team to support the SL&RR network and implementation of the model across Gippsland.

CERC was commissioned to evaluate the NWG Capacity Building Project. In Phase 1, from 2020 to 2022, the CERC completed the evaluation of this phase and submitted the report. The project was awarded an extension of funding to continue the evaluation through June 2024 for Phase 2.

3. THE EVALUATION OF THE NEW WAVE GIPPSLAND CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

3.1 AIM OF THE EVALUATION

Phase 2 of this evaluation aimed to assess the ongoing impact and reach of the SL&RR program activities, how the program was received by participants, and what impact the program had on the broader Gippsland community.

Key evaluation questions included:

- What were the measurable impact, outcomes, and process learnings of the New Wave capacity-building program?
- What challenges were encountered by the project team?
- What are the perceived benefits to the community of introducing a capacity-building program in Gippsland?

This evaluation focused on Phase 2 (January 2023 - June 2024) of the program. In this phase, the CERC facilitated a reflection workshop with GCASA staff to set project direction and priorities and then evaluated these program priorities.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION / TOOLS USED

The project evaluation utilised a variety of data collection tools in a mixed methods approach, which provided information about process, outcomes, and impact. The quantitative and qualitative data collected are shown in Figure 1 below.

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Quantitative Data                    Qualitative Data

Survey feedback from                 Thematic analysis of
stakeholder participants             GCASA project team
                                     interviews

Survey feedback from                 Thematic analysis of
SL&RR program                        SL&RR peer educator
participants                         interviews

                                     Thematic analysis of
                                     SR&RR program
                                     participant interviews

                                     Workshop focus group
                                     analysis
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Figure 1: Data collection tools

4. PROJECT WORKSHOPS

Throughout the New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project, the CERC team facilitated several workshops. These workshops aimed to provide a platform for project stakeholders to stop, pause, and reflect on project activities, redefining or evolving the project based on outcomes over time.

Details of the measuring success workshop undertaken in Phase 1 of the project in 2020 – 2022 have been summarised below to provide context for the Phase 2 workshops. This initial workshop assisted in defining the aim and significance of the project and how the project stakeholders could encourage the sustainability of the SL&RR program delivery. Discussion surrounding the building of the project network was also included.

On commencement of Phase 2 of the program, a reflection workshop was organised in June 2023 to review as a project team where the project had started and how it had evolved since its inception. This workshop was facilitated by the CERC evaluation team to showcase the findings from the Phase 1 project report and to enable the team to reflect on the year that was and plan for the next phase of the project delivery.

Also provided in this section of the report is an outline of the April 2024 reflections workshop and the June 2024 final reflections and recommendations workshop. The April 2024 workshop provided an opportunity for project stakeholders to discuss the benefits and barriers of the SL&RR program delivery, whilst the June 2024 workshop encouraged the development of future program recommendations surrounding personnel, network, policy, and program delivery.

Additional learnings and reflections have been provided by the project team, outlining the challenges faced, personal and professional benefits gained, and the hopes for the future of the project as defined by the SL&RR program staff.

Image: Project workshop participants

4.1 PHASE 1 PROJECT SUMMARY

4.1.1 Measuring Success Workshop – November 2020

In November 2020, the CERC team facilitated a 'measuring success' workshop with members of New Wave, GCASA, and the local council. This workshop was conducted virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions and aimed to develop a shared understanding of the project, define what success looked like and how it could be measured.

The workshop group discussed the project 'barbeque statement' which is a way to tell people about the project without using academic terminology. This statement provided an overview of the project without using jargon or complex language, ensuring the general population can understand and interpret what is being said. Team members of the New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project described the project using this technique with two examples provided below:

- *"I am working on an educational project that supports people living with disability. It's all about teaching."*
- *"[I'm] working on this really exciting project where we're working with people with disabilities around trying to help them to navigate relationships and sexuality, staying safe. Super exciting as they're educating their peers…"*

The group defined their hopes for their project and discussed why it was important and necessary for the project to run in Gippsland. The importance of the project was defined by the high rates of sexual assault and violence in the region, particularly towards those with a disability. Outlined below (Figure 2) were key features of the project that stakeholders wanted to ensure carried through the project's development and delivery.

Empowerment & Trust
- Empowering people with a disability to feel safe.
- Empowering people with a disability to report assult and seek support.
- Ensure people with disability feel seen and heard when reporting and/or accessing agencies and services.

Community Understanding
- Ensuring the SL&RR program message was understood by people with a disability, stakeholders, organisations, and people of influence within the community.
- Recognition that the program was "groundbreaking" in its approach to building knowledge and understanding.

Education & Skills Development
- Build capacity of the project Peer Educators
- Educate parents and carers about the importance of the SL&RR program.
- Break down barriers people with a disability face when accessing education surrounding sexual lives and respectful relationships.
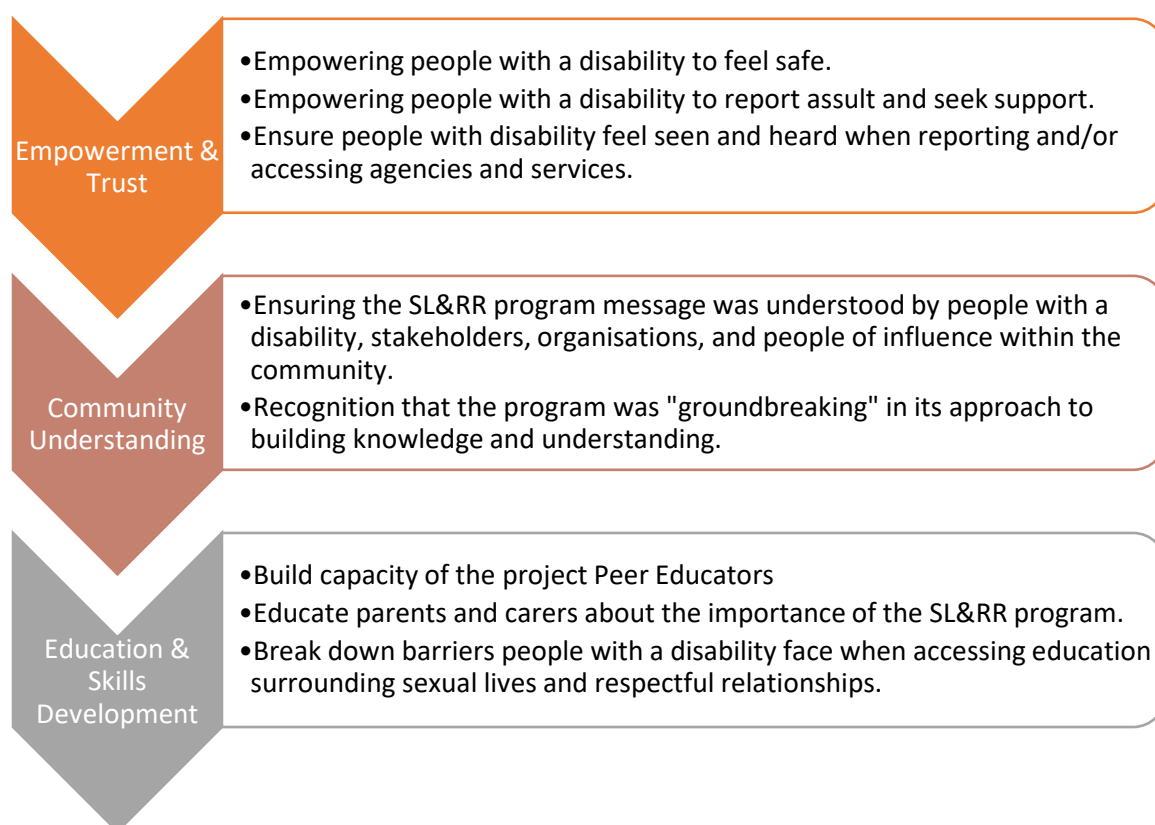
Figure 2: 2020 measuring success workshop - stakeholder hopes for the project

Workshop participants engaged in a measuring success activity that enabled them to view what success looked like from the various stakeholders involved in the project, including the clients, New Wave, GCASA and the funding body.

From the perspective of the New Wave members, success was defined as the ability to deliver the SL&RR program sustainably, be self-advocates, experts and recognised as such within the program. Furthermore, they wanted to ensure people with a disability knew how to access support services, and knew how and why to engage with the SL&RR program as a service.

From the perspective of participants, stakeholders defined success as opportunities to learn, develop skills, and become empowered through education. Throughout workshop discussions, it was outlined that success could be defined for participants as their ability to connect to new peers and safely discuss relationships, consent, and respect, as well as know where and how to seek support if required.

Measuring success from the perspective of GCASA included being successful in upskilling and training staff to facilitate the SL&RR program. Furthermore, an important element when determining program success was seeing a reduction in sexual assault and family violence, whilst also seeing an increase in access to disability services, knowledge about sexuality, assault, and people's rights, and seeing an increase in community awareness of the program and its impact.

Similarly, from the project funder's perspective, they measured success in seeing a statistical reduction in sexual assault and family violence. Furthermore, they hoped to see the sustainability of the program, with increasing enrolments and successful completions. The program funder also wanted to see an increase in access for people with disability to the appropriate services and for the SL&RR program to be embedded in the broader health and community sector.

The final element of the November 2020 measuring success workshop was the development of a project name and logo, which was created using a word cloud approach. The final name was collaboratively decided on as Peer Relationship Education Partners – PREP, with a logo developed (Figure 3).
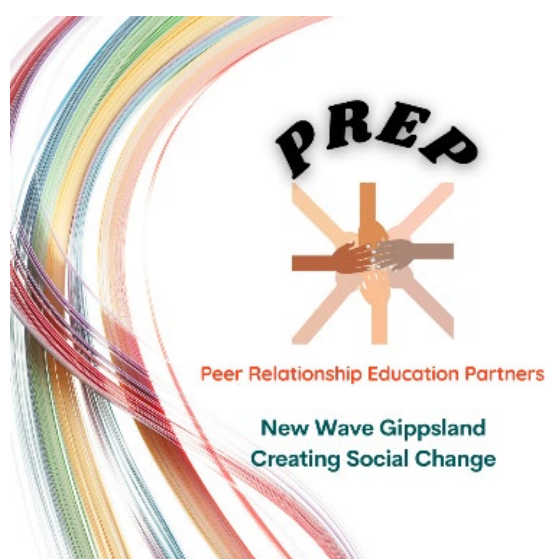

Figure 3: 2020 measuring success workshop – developing the project name and logo

4.1.2 Development of the SL&RR network

Defined in Phase 1 of the project, it was determined by the project partners that a network was to be developed to guide the delivery of the SL&RR program throughout Gippsland. The establishment of the network enabled further discussion and inclusion from all members of the project team, New Wave participants and affiliated organisations and agencies. Participants noted that being on the network increased their confidence in participating in discussions, project reporting, and planning. Participants also felt that being involved in the network helped them to develop leadership skills. Table 1 below lists the network partners involved in the project from Phase 1.

Table 1: New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project network members

New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project Network Members
New Wave Gippsland (NWG)
Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault (GCASA)
Gippsland Disability Advocacy Inc (GDAI)
Latrobe City Council
Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV)
Gippsland Women's Health (GWH)
Overcoming Obstacles
Bass Coast Health Family Violence and Counselling
Deakin University SL&RR Team Representative
University of Waikato Associate Professor, Disability**,** and Inclusion Studies
South Gippsland Shire Community
Bass Coast Shire
Latrobe Community Health Services (LCHS)
Federation University

4.2 PHASE 2 REFLECTION WORKSHOP – JUNE 2023

A project reflections workshop was undertaken in June 2023, six months into Phase 2 of the New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project. This workshop aimed to collate learnings to date from the project, determine what the project strengths and challenges were, and how the project team could plan for the next 12 months. During this workshop, a functional model of the project was developed, demonstrating the initial intended reach versus the actual reach, capacity, and impact of the project. Included in this reflection workshop were the CERC evaluation team, GCASA project staff and the Peer Educators.

The key outcomes of the reflection workshop, outlined in Figure 4 below, demonstrate the strengths, challenges, strategies, and future plans for the project as outlined by project stakeholders.
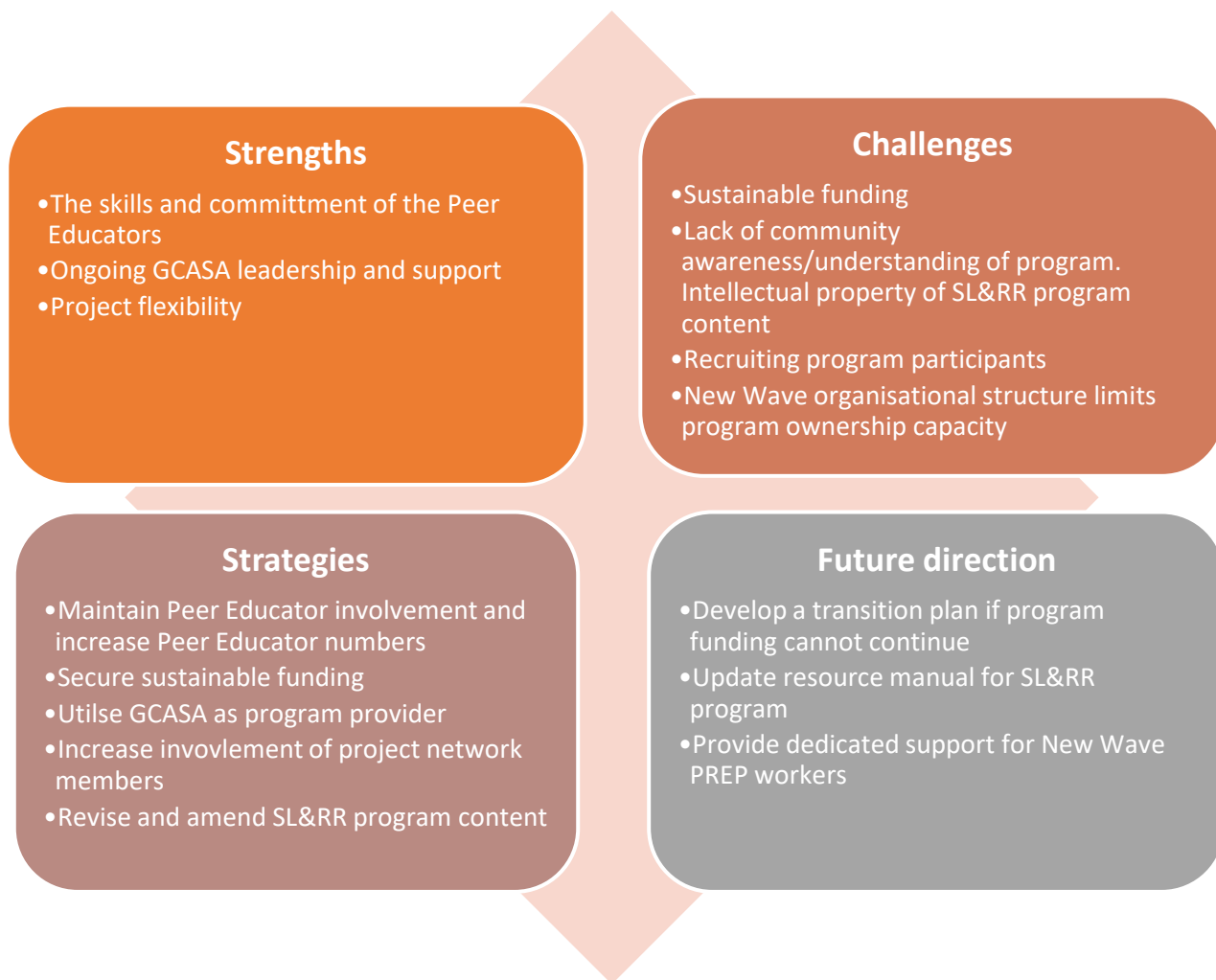
Strengths
- The skills and committment of the Peer Educators
- Ongoing GCASA leadership and support
- Project flexibility

Challenges
- Sustainable funding
- Lack of community awareness/understanding of program. Intellectual property of SL&RR program content
- Recruiting program participants
- New Wave organisational structure limits program ownership capacity

Strategies
- Maintain Peer Educator involvement and increase Peer Educator numbers
- Secure sustainable funding
- Utilse GCASA as program provider
- Increase invovlement of project network members
- Revise and amend SL&RR program content

Future direction
- Develop a transition plan if program funding cannot continue
- Update resource manual for SL&RR program
- Provide dedicated support for New Wave PREP workers

Figure 4: June 2023 reflection workshop outcomes

Developing the functional model for the program

Workshop discussions surrounding the current project model saw a shift from recruiting program participants to educating the broader network partners. It was identified that the SL&RR program numbers needed to be revised and made more realistic for the next delivery period.

Figure 5 below outlines how the program was originally designed to reach participants and the actual reach that occurred during the running of the program. Originally, the program intended to reach 250 people with a disability (inner orange circle), and equal numbers of stakeholders, including professional networks, organisations, caregivers, and families (outer blue circle). In actuality, the program did not achieve the participant numbers as projected. However, an unexpected outcome of the program was the greater reach that occurred with the professional networks, organisations, caregivers, and families. These networks included formal and informal communications, including Café Catch-Ups, meetings, outreach sessions and online communications. Regardless of projected versus actual program reach, it was realised that both program participants and network numbers increased in Phase 2 of the project.
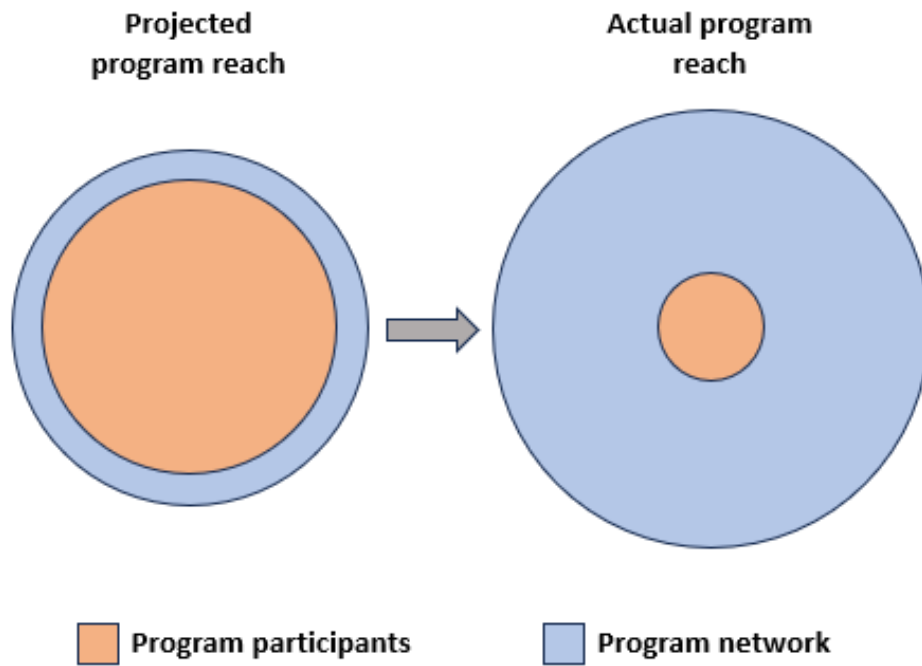
Figure 5: Transition from the intended model to a functional model

The project delivery team, including New Wave Peer Educators and GCASA facilitators, continued to remain committed to providing opportunities for participants, a broader network, and organisations to engage in the program content and resources. The PREP team continued to deliver the SL&RR program to small groups across Gippsland and connect with individuals and networks through information sessions, Café Catch-Ups, and network meetings. GCASA explored opportunities to develop the resources and content further. The focus shifted from aiming for the target program participant numbers to delivering awareness and education sessions to the broader network.

4.3 PHASE 2 REFLECTION WORKSHOP - APRIL 2024

The CERC evaluation team facilitated a reflection workshop in April 2024 to discuss the program's key successes and challenges based on the functional model agreed upon in the June 2023 workshop. The research team conducted focus group discussions to discuss the program's successes and challenges and key recommendations for improving the SL&RR program. The evaluation team received further secondary documents from the GCASA program team to support the findings of the workshop discussions.

4.3.1 What does success look like?

Developed from workshop discussions, the GCASA program staff and Peer Educators considered that the projects' success was indicative of three important domains: funding, the SL&RR program, and people with an intellectual disability. Within the funding domain, workshop participants outlined the importance of ongoing funding for the project to ensure operations could continue and be sustainable. Concern arose that a lack of funding may lead to "vulnerable people falling through the cracks". Workshop members were also concerned that without adequate funding, the program may not be able to employ the most supportive and qualified staff to facilitate.

When discussing the success of the SL&RR program, workshop participants suggested the program could be a "mandatory" suggestion to clients from support agencies. They believed it was important to reduce gatekeeping from people with intellectual disabilities, and this may be achieved by increasing the awareness and understanding of organisations, community, family and carers regarding program content and the sexual rights of People with an Intellectual Disability.

The inclusion of People with an Intellectual Disability was fundamental to the program's success. Workshop members outlined that it was essential for program participants to feel happy, supported, and empowered during their involvement in the SL&RR program. Success was also measured by the facilitation of appropriate and safe referral pathways for People with an Intellectual Disability to GCASA services.

4.3.2 What is working well?

During workshop discussions, participants also discussed what they believed to be currently working well within the project delivery in 2023 and 2024. Five major themes were identified in this discussion, including Project team, Training delivery approaches, SL&RR program delivery, People with intellectual disabilities, and Peer Educators (Figure 6).
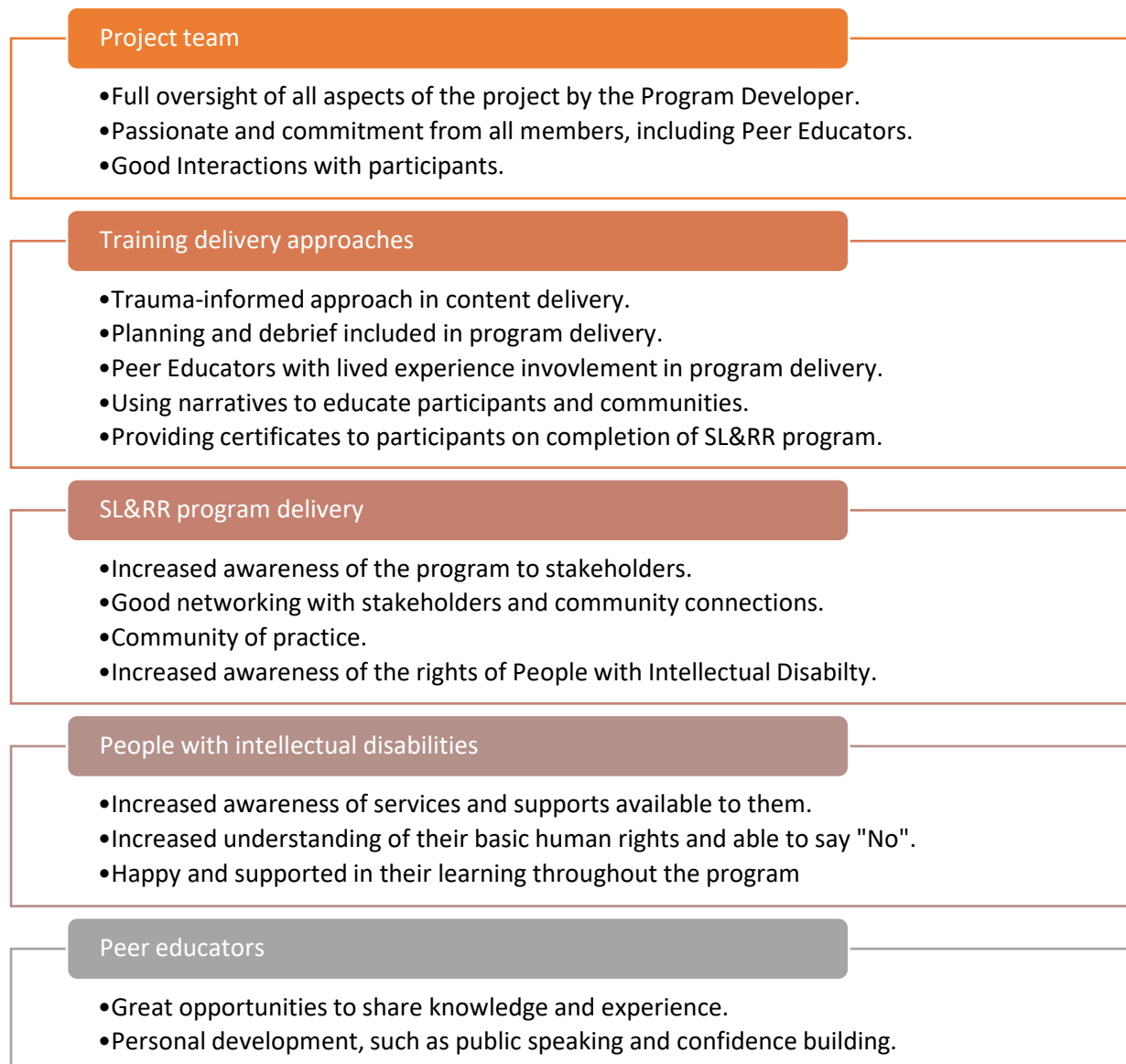
Project team

- Full oversight of all aspects of the project by the Program Developer.
- Passionate and commitment from all members, including Peer Educators.
- Good Interactions with participants.

Training delivery approaches

- Trauma-informed approach in content delivery.
- Planning and debrief included in program delivery.
- Peer Educators with lived experience invovlement in program delivery.
- Using narratives to educate participants and communities.
- Providing certificates to participants on completion of SL&RR program.

SL&RR program delivery

- Increased awareness of the program to stakeholders.
- Good networking with stakeholders and community connections.
- Community of practice.
- Increased awareness of the rights of People with Intellectual Disabilty.

People with intellectual disabilities

- Increased awareness of services and supports available to them.
- Increased understanding of their basic human rights and able to say "No".
- Happy and supported in their learning throughout the program

Peer educators

- Great opportunities to share knowledge and experience.
- Personal development, such as public speaking and confidence building.

Figure 6: April 2024 reflection workshop: what is working well?

4.3.3 What are the challenges?

Also discussed during the April 2024 workshop with GCASA staff and Peer Educator participants was what they believed to be the major challenges to project delivery in 2023 and 2024. Workshop participants outlined challenges, including insufficient support for the program team, limited access to People with Intellectual Disability, limited use of inclusive language, lack of understanding from people with "authority" and future funding as barriers to their potential success in program delivery.

When discussing the tension amongst the team during program delivery, it was identified that Peer Educators had different capacities, lived experiences, traumas, personalities, and perspectives, which at times created tension. This tension during program delivery was further exacerbated by the perceived insufficient support received by the project team, including limited access to additional SL&RR program Facilitators and Counsellor.

An additional challenge identified in the 2023-2024 program delivery was the perceived limited accessibility of People with an Intellectual Disability to support services. Workshop participants believed that a degree of "gatekeeping" was being witnessed, whereby delivery of the SL&RR program content to People with Intellectual Disability would "*open up too much of a can of worms*" for service providers and/or parents, guardians, and carers. Workshop participants also discussed the challenges they faced in limited appropriate and safe services to refer SL&RR program participants to and the potential long wait times for these services. Stakeholders outlined that follow-up for participants who required referral was lacking and was identified as needing resolution in future. They also highlighted the lack of education and limited awareness of the program content and its implications by medical practitioners, health-related providers, and institutions working with women. It was identified that this lack of understanding may have contributed to biases and potential coercive control.

Workshop participants also outlined some concerns with the SL&RR program content, including the lack of inclusive language identified in the program resources. Participants outlined that language surrounding LGBTQIA+ sexual lives and respectful relationships was inappropriate and outdated, and some jargon included in the program resources was difficult for program participants with intellectual difficulties to understand. Workshop participants outlined that whilst the program content required updating and revision, uncertainty surrounding future program funding hindered SL&RR program adaptation and increased anxiety in some staff regarding the program's future.

4.3.4 What strategies can be put in place to manage the challenges?

During the April 2024 workshop, the participants suggested some strategies to address the aforementioned challenges as follows:

- **Support** the program team and **reduce tension** among the members through realistic goal setting with reasonable timeframes, implementation of clear structures, simplified reporting, increased flexibility, and inclusion of administrative support.
- **Capacity development** for Peer Educators, GCASA staff, and Program Developers, which includes training on trauma, emotional intelligence, self-regulation, facilitation skills, and conflict management.
- Providing **more education about the program with program partners.**
- Providing more **education programs** and broader **awareness-raising** for the community, including implementation of education programs with real stories/anecdotes, widening program reach through social media, inclusion of people with disabilities in council meetings and decision-making forums, and awareness-raising of the importance of respective relationships and sexual rights.
- More **collaboration** with external stakeholders and networks.

4.3.5 Recommendations for future programs

Drawing on their experience running the SL&RR program, the workshop participants outlined several key recommendations for any future similar programs. These recommendations centred around ensuring a participant-centred approach for all program delivery (Figure 7).

Figure 7: April 2024 reflections workshop: future program considerations

Within the participant centred approach to SL&RR program delivery, workshop participants highlighted the importance of assessing a participant's "readiness" to undertake the program. This included assessing their capacity to understand new information, preferred learning style, level of intellectual ability, and best individual supportive measures if participants were to become distressed. Providing program participants with the opportunity to opt-in or out at any time during the program was also discussed as important in providing autonomy and empowerment to make their own decisions.

When facilitating meaningful engagement and learning, workshop participants outlined the importance of ensuring program delivery was not tokenistic, and that sexual health education was tailored to the needs of the community they were serving. Ensuring program content was flexible in its delivery mode, inclusive of all community members, and used language and tone that was appropriate for different levels of ability was key to meaningful engagement and best learning outcomes. They also suggested that completing the SL&RR program more than once may be beneficial for some participants to solidify learning outcomes. When providing appropriate learning environments, workshop participants stated the importance of appropriate training facilities that were accessible and convenient for program participants.

Creating a safe space for learning and growth was outlined as essential in program delivery, ensuring all program delivery was trauma informed. Workshop participants discussed the importance of creating a safe space for participants to express their views, experiences, and ideas, whilst always maintaining respectful boundaries and communication. Another consideration was the exclusion of people with personal relationships (carers and family) from the program delivery to minimise discomfort and a potentially coercive environment. Follow up post the SL&RR program was also

demonstrated as a potential future consideration, ensuring past participants were still supported, remained connected to their peers, and knew when and how to access support if required.

The final future consideration from workshop participants was supporting the continued involvement of Peer Educators in delivery of the SL&RR program. Participants highlighted the importance of Peer Educator lived experience in program delivery, providing a supportive link for program participants to feel seen and understood in their capacity and learning. It was identified that Peer Educators should have access to debriefing opportunities post-program, and considerations must be made to their capacity, feelings, and exposure to triggering content. Encouraging active listening of Peer Educators in the program delivery space was also outlined as important to improve emotional intelligence, increase understanding and improve communication skills with program Facilitators and participants.

4.4 PHASE 2 REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENTIONS WORKSHOP

A final project reflections and recommendations workshop was undertaken in June 2024 with the CERC evaluation team, GCASA project staff and the Peer Educators to discuss the PREP program, reflecting on learnings, recommendations, and considerations for potential future iterations of the program. The workshop covered four main topics, including SL&RR Program Personnel, Program Network, Policy Considerations, and Program Delivery. These major topics explored who and how people should be included in the PREP program, the potential reach of the program and incorporation of support from external agencies, increasing awareness and embedding trauma informed principles in the program in local/state/national government, and how the program could be re-developed based on the learnings from Facilitators, Peer Educators, staff, and participants. The outcomes of this workshop formed the basis for the development and co-creation of project recommendations.

4.2.1 GCASA staff and Peer Educator internal reflections

The Program Developer provided the CERC evaluation team with a summary of the SL&RR program achievements identified in 2023. This information was reviewed and presented as an infographic below, highlighting several major achievements recognised by GCASA staff and the Peer Educators. The documented achievements summarised the program's increased reach, its benefits to people with intellectual disabilities, and the important inclusion of the Peer Educators in the program content delivery.

Similarly to the project's achievements, a summary of the major learnings was provided by the Program Developer, highlighting several learnings identified by GCASA staff and the Peer Educators during 2023. This information was reviewed and presented as an infographic below. The major learnings summarised the desire of Peer Educators to have access to more training and supervision, the barriers faced in presenting the program to the community who may not understand the intent or content provided in the SL&RR program, the importance of reflection during the project, and the potential scope for the project in future.

SL&RR Gippsland Learnings - 2023

Challenge: Organisations being hesitant to share information due to conflicts with internal programs and / or lack of understanding of the program.

The need for more structured professional development for Peer Educators has become apparent and discussions are underway to find the best options to navigate this. Peer Educator supervision has commenced.

Further rounds of scoping of agencies to approach for collaboration were commenced. This work will be a priority when funding is obtained for a redevelopment.

The team were able to constantly reflect and adapt to changing landscapes without minimising the important messaging of the program and the value of the work they do. This included media interviews, co-designing workshops and presentations for delivery to support agency staff, local government and other external agencies.

There is enormous scope for growth, redevelopment, and fostering of relationships and training in its facilitation across the State, not simply in the Gippsland region. There is certainly enough interest in the program and its ethos for this to occur quite quickly once the capacity is there.

5. THE REACH OF THE PROGRAM BASED ON THE FUNCTIONAL MODEL

The PREP team continued to deliver the SL&RR program to small groups across Gippsland and connect with individuals and networks through information sessions and/or presentations, Café Catch-Ups, and network meetings.

The CERC research team analysed quantitative data on program outputs provided by the GCASA team to compare these outputs between Phase 1 and Phase 2. These program outputs were focused on information sessions/presentations to different networks and/or organisations, Café Catch-Ups, and the SL&RR program delivery to people with intellectual disabilities.

5.1 PROGRAM OUTPUTS IN PHASE 1 VERSUS PHASE 2

In Phase 2, as shown in Figure 8 below, the total number of SL&RR program participants increased from 30 in Phase 1 to 44 in Phase 2, despite the duration of program implementation in Phase 2 being six months less than Phase 1. Similarly, the number of participants attending Café Catch-Up events dramatically increased from 72 in Phase 1 to 390 participants in Phase 2. In addition to the above two discussed outputs, in Phase 2, the program produced media newsletters and distributed 11,150 copies to relevant network organisations in Gippsland.

However, the total number of participants attending information sessions and/or presentations in Phase 2 is lower than that in Phase 1. Two reasons might explain this: one, the duration of program implementation in Phase 2 was six months less than in Phase 1, and another, the PREP program team reached all the relevant organisations in Gippsland.
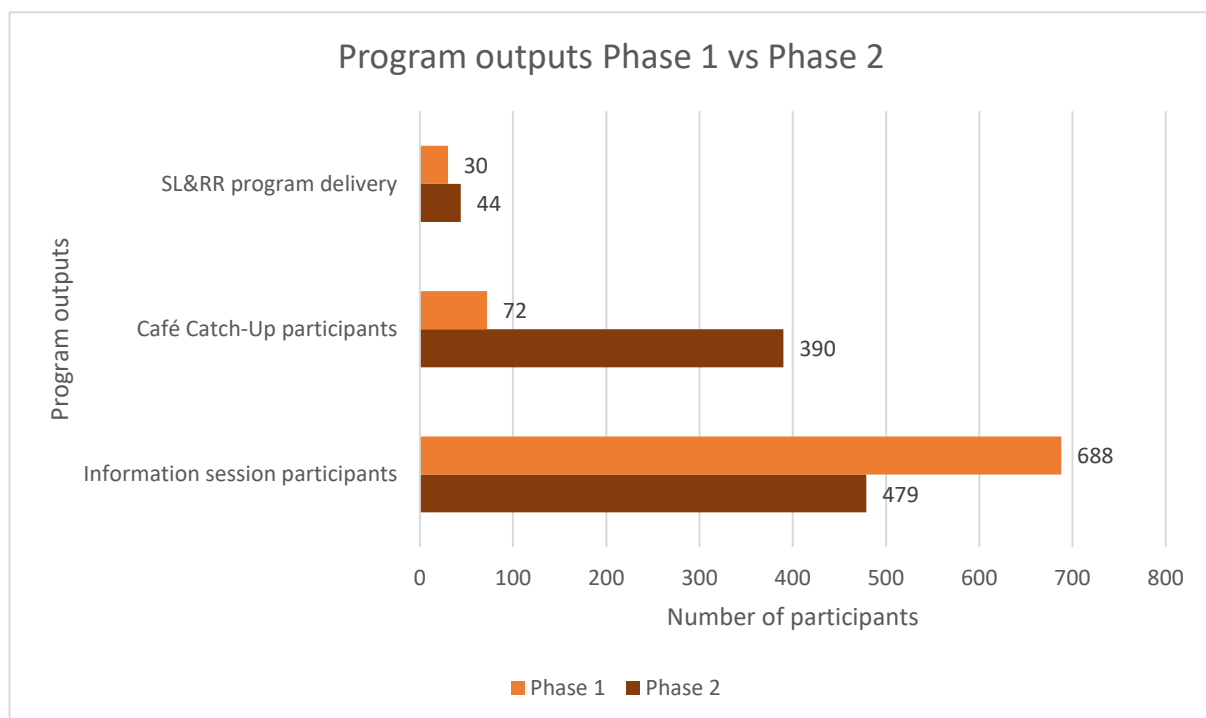
Figure 8: Program outputs Phase 1 versus 2

5.2 REACH AND ENGAGEMENT OF THE SL&RR PROGRAM IN PHASE 2

The reach and engagement of the SL&RR program across Gippsland is represented in Figure 9 and Figure 10 below. These figures demonstrate how Phase 2 of the program was attended in all six Local Government Authorities (LGAs) across Gippsland, including how many times sessions were attended at each locality, and the attendance numbers for the program across Gippsland.
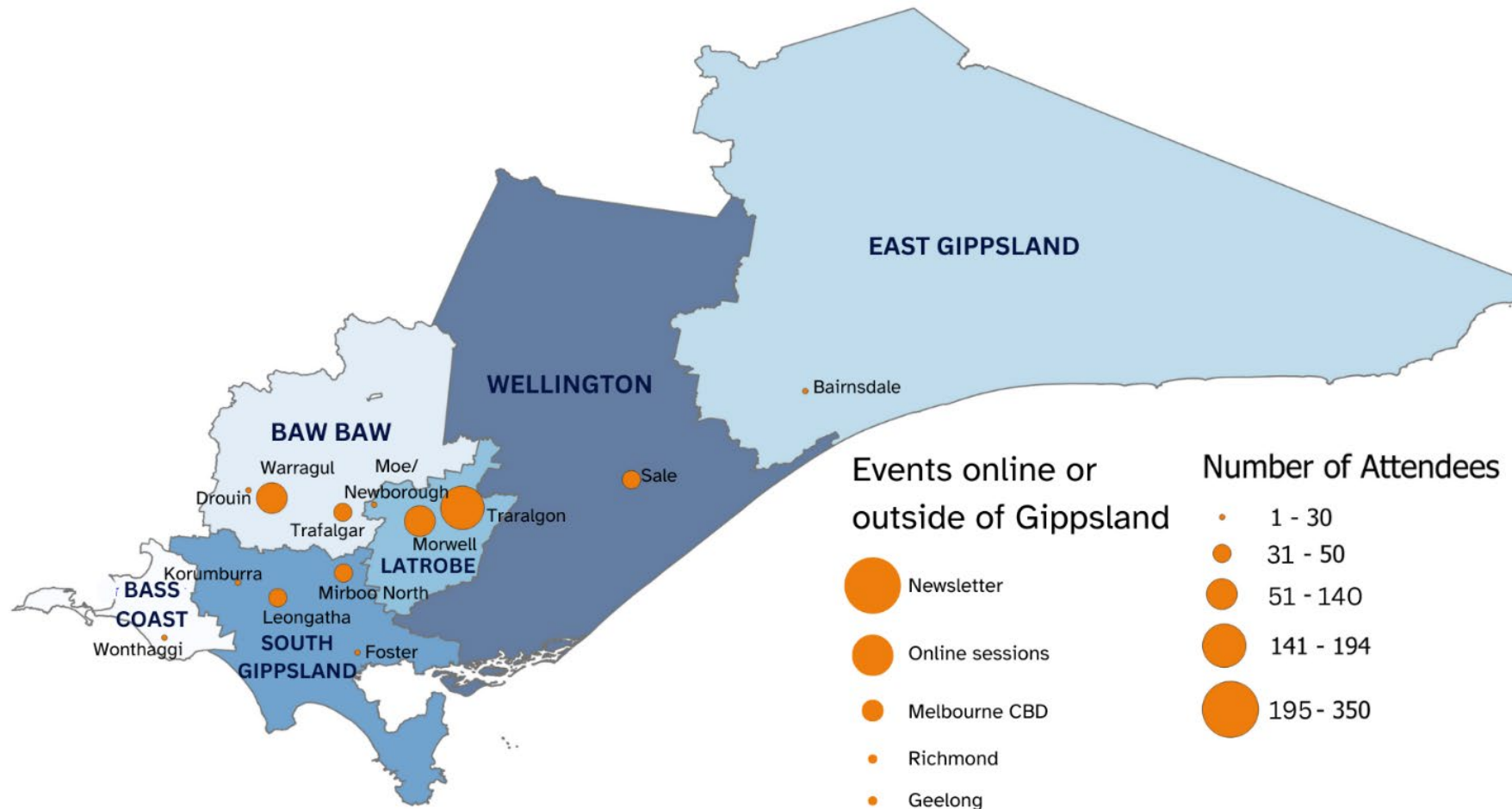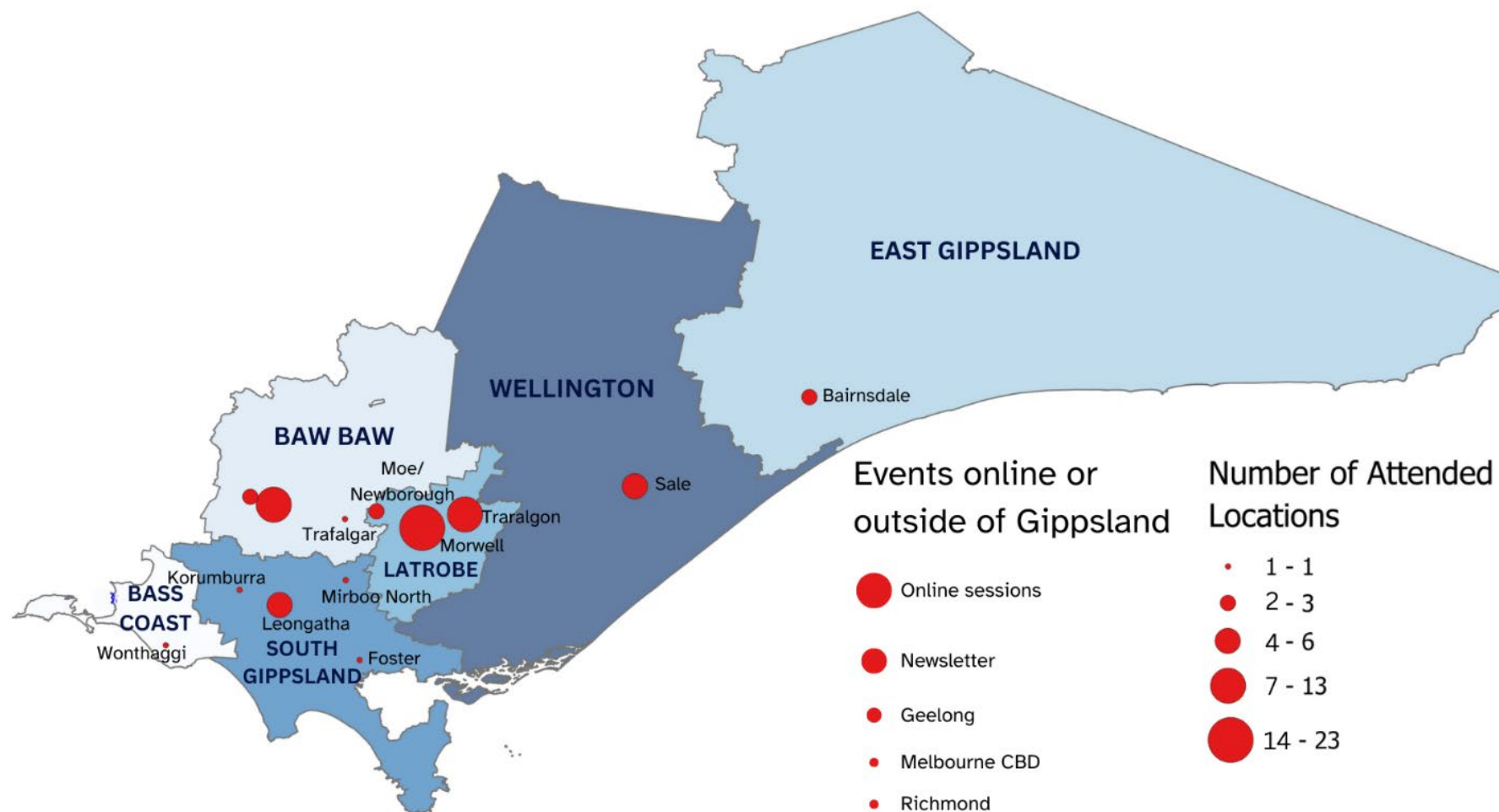

Figure 9: Spread of number of event attendees in Gippsland – Phase 2

Figure 10: Spread of number of event locations in Gippsland – Phase 2

5.3 ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SL&RR PROGRAM

The following data presents detailed information on the organisations and groups that engaged with the SL&RR program, comparing Phase 1 and Phase 2 attendance statistics. Whilst the Phase 1 report presented detailed program outputs from 2020 to 2022, brief total attendance numbers have been included in this report for the purposes of comparison.

Phase 1:

In 2021, 15 presentations were delivered to approximately 170 people. Organisations and networks involved in the program in 2021 included:

- GCASA
- Morwell Interchange
- Bass Coast Interchange
- Baw Baw Family Violence Prevention Network
- Moe Library
- Yooralla Women's Group
- Yooralla Men's Group
- Overcoming Obstacles, Stratford
- Knoxbrooke Staff Group
- Marwarra, Warragul
- Central and West Gippsland Primary Care Partnership
- Gippsland Disability Advocacy Inc (GDAI)
- Latrobe Prevention of Men's Violence Against Women's Network
- South Coast Partnership to Prevent Men's Violence Against Women
- Latrobe New Wave Members Group.

In 2022, Peer Educators were involved in several network activities, network meetings, sector development information sessions, Peer Educator meetings, workshops, and planning meetings. The PREP team presented information sessions, staff training, Café Catch-Up events, and media to over 500 individuals and approximately 20 organisations (Table 2).

Table 2: 2022 program delivery and attendees

EVENT	ATTENDEES
Presentation to GCASA employees	60
Presentation to GCASA Board members	6
Gippsland Women's Health Sexual Health Forum	30
Baw Baw Information Session	10
Latrobe Information Session	6
Sexual Assault Services Victoria (SASVic) AGM: Melbourne Town Hall	40
Wellways employees	5
FOCUS Frankston Information Session	7
Moe service provider expo	30+
New stakeholders: information sessions	22
Cafe catch-ups across multiple LGAs	72
General Information sessions	208

Pre-Program Information sessions	94 (Includes 28 in LGA specific Information sessions above)
Facilitator Training	5 new program partners / 1 new Peer Educator
TOTAL	**596**

Phase 2:

In Phase 2, the detailed program delivery is presented in four tables below: the first for the SL&RR program participants, the second for Café Catch-Up events, the third for information sessions/presentations, and the final for media newsletters.

In Phase 2 of the project, the SL&RR program included a total of 35 sessions, with 44 participants involved in these sessions (Table 3). There were several disclosures of historical sexual abuse or assault, with referrals made back to GCASA for support and management.

Table 3: Phase 2 SL&RR program participants

GROUP AND GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS	NO. SESSIONS	NO. PARTICIPANTS	REFERRALS FROM PROGRAM	REFERRALS BACK TO GCASA	DISCLOSURE CASES
Moe Hub	2	3	1	0	0
Bairnsdale Hub in East Gippsland	4	4	1	0	0
South Gippsland	4	8	0	1	0
Moe Club in Latrobe City	5	3	0	0	0
West Gippsland TAFE in Baw Baw Shire	5	4	0	0	0
Carry On Café in Morwell	3	7	0	1	2
Overcoming Obstacles, Stratford in Wellington Shire	4	3	0	1	1
Knoxbrooke in Warragul in Baw Baw Shire	4	8	0	0	0
Baw Baw Shire	4	4	0	0	1
TOTAL	**35**	**44**	**2**	**3**	**4**

In Phase 2 of the project, the Café Catch-Up sessions increased significantly, with 390 people attending these sessions, including approximately 57 people with disability. Other attendees of these sessions included GCASA staff, Peer Educators, CERC research team members, network and stakeholder members, family members and care providers (Table 4).

Table 4: Phase 2 Café Catch-Up events and participants

NO.	CAFÉ CATCH-UP EVENTS AND VENUES	ATTENDEES	PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY
1	Cafe catch-up Bairnsdale @ The Wooden Squirrel	7	5
2	GDAI staff	12	0
3	Facilitator training	6	0
4	Facilitator training	5	0
5	Online external stakeholders	10	0
6	Bairnsdale / East information session	5	3
7	Café catch up Morwell @ Carry On Cafe	6	5
8	GWH forum	30	0
9	Disability Inclusion Community of Practice (CoP)	16	8
10	Lead emails with flyers and info to organisations (to date)	17	0
11	LEO Yooralla info/call	1	0
12	Moe / Latrobe information session	4	0
13	Foster Community Health Services – Sam Park	1	0
14	Warragul / Baw Baw information session	4	0
15	Sale / East information session	6	0
16	Interact biggest morning tea	40	6
17	Café catch up South-East (Drouin)	9	8
18	Warragul Community Health clinical staff presentation	6	0
19	Evaluation meeting	8	0
20	Medical students @GCASA	2	0
21	New staff induction	4	0
22	Pax Hill Football Club juniors and parents during an education session	45	0
23	Warragul Soccer Club during ed session	23	0
24	LCHS nurse – Jess at GCASA	1	0
25	Anglicare Vic – Practitioner group, Mirboo North	50	0
26	Café Catch-Up Latrobe	10	7
27	Network meeting	5	0
28	South Coast information session	5	0
29	Café catch up Leongatha	17	12
30	Latrobe information session	7	0
31	Network meeting	5	3
32	Induction/information session for new staff @ Lifeskills	2	0
33	Interact information/planning session	2	0
34	Café catch up Morwell @ Claudia's Cafe	11	0
35	Café catch up Warragul @ Violet and Ivy	4	0
36	Briefing for CAs coming into the space x 3 sessions x 3 CAs various dates April to May	4	0
	TOTAL	390	57

Also significantly expanded in Phase 2 of the project was the increased delivery of information sessions about the SL&RR program. Table X demonstrates the broad range of venues and information sessions that were delivered by the GCASA staff and Peer Educators during 2023 and 2024. There was a total of 479 attendees to the information sessions, including approximately 72 People with Disability (Table 5).

Table 5: Phase 2 information sessions and participants

NO.	INFORMATION SESSIONS AND VENUES	ATTENDEES	PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY
1	Stall at Midsumma Festival, Melbourne	50	0
2	Gippsland Disability Advocacy: Online and in-person staff meeting	14	0
3	Gippsland Big Day Out, Traralgon Art Centre	50	30
4	Having a Say conference, Geelong (1)	15	11
5	Having a Say conference, Geelong (2)	15	9
6	Yooralla staff	4	0
7	Scope	2	0
8	Melba Morwell – staff and supported clients	16	4
9	Anglicare	3	0
10	Induction of new GCASA staff	3	0
11	NDIS LAC staff online presentation	40	0
12	MDC Induction (external)	9	0
13	GCASA staff planning day	30	3
14	Small business networking event, Traralgon	7	0
15	SASVic AGM	35	0
16	Yooralla Drouin staff	7	0
17	Yooralla Leongatha staff	12	0
18	Induction for medical students	2	0
19	Induction for social work students	2	0
20	Trafalgar High School pop-up	50	0
21	Induction for medical students	2	0
22	Women with Disabilities CoP	19	15
23	Neami	4	0
24	Gippsland Public Health / LRH	2	0
25	Wellington GE Partnership meeting	9	0
26	Yooralla Women's group	7	0
27	Yooralla Men's group	8	0
28	Recruiting for Diversity Session 1	28	0
29	Recruiting for Diversity Session 2	22	0
30	Gippsland Disability Advocacy (GDAI) – re-engagement	0	0
31	FOCUS, Frankston (John Edgar)	12	0
32	Neami Ltd (Morwell)	4	0
	TOTAL	479	72

In Phase 2 of the project, data received from GCASA project staff demonstrated that approximately 913 people were reached, including SL&RR program participants, stakeholders, organisations, network members, current and prospective GCASA staff, health professionals, family members and carers. This growth in reach demonstrated a 36.2% increase in program reach in 2023/24 compared to 2020-2022.

Image: GCASA program staff

Image: SL&RR program delivery

Image: Collaborative thematic analysis

6. QUANTITATIVE DATA

6.1 FEEDBACK FROM PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

In Phase 2 of the project, 44 People with Intellectual Disabilities attended the SL&RR program sessions. Participants responding to the survey experienced intellectual disability and/or ABI on a variety of levels. Of the 44 participants, 25 participants were asked to complete a feedback survey form. Of the 25 respondents, 22 agreed to provide their demographic information. Half were men, and 45% were women. One participant (5%) identified as non-binary, as shown in Figure 11.
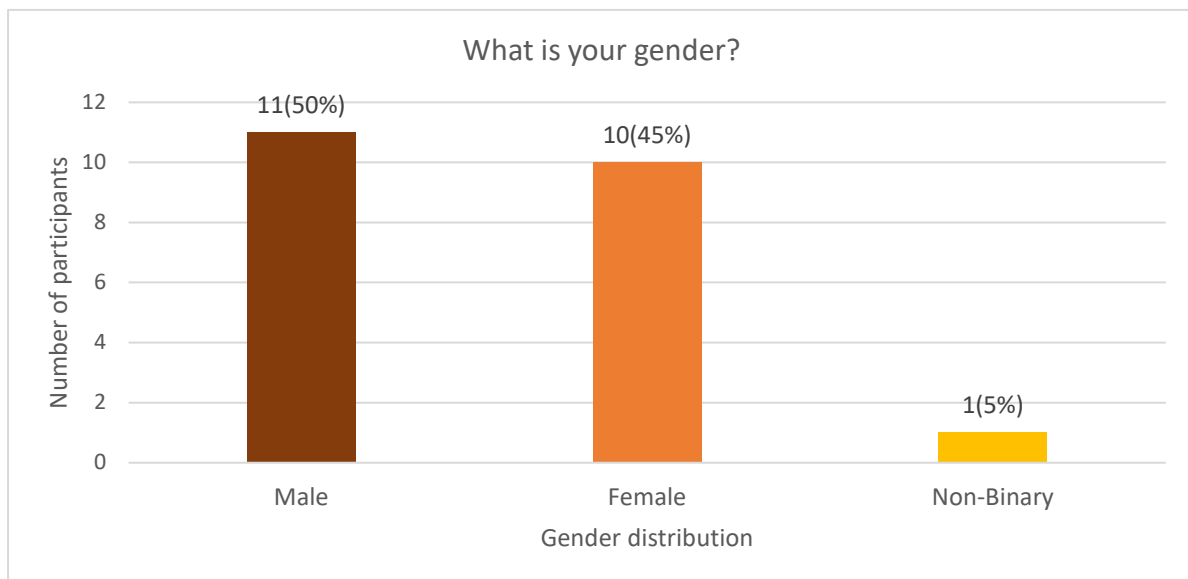
Figure 11: Gender distribution of participants

A total of 16 of 25 survey respondents agreed to provide information about their age. The majority of the participants were aged between 25 and 44 years old. Whilst 63% (n=10) were aged 25 and 34, 19% (n=3) were aged 35 to 44. As shown in Figure 12, the remaining participants fell under three other age categories: 18-24, 45-54, and 55-64.
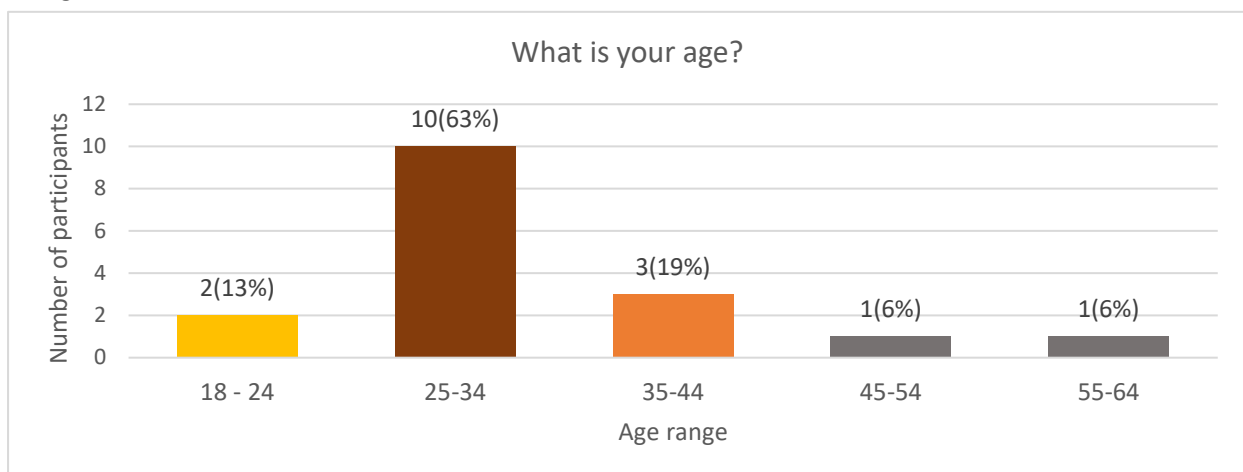
Figure 12: Age of survey respondents

Only 13 of the 25 survey respondents agreed to provide their postcodes. Participants came from eight different postcodes, with the top two postcodes being Bairnsdale (3875, n=4) and Korumburra (3950, n=4). Each of the towns, Warragul (3820), Sale (3850), and Leongatha district (3952), had two participants. One participant came from Moe (3825), Gormandale (3873) and Buchan (3885). Postcodes were transferred into town name for ease of interpretation (Figure 13).
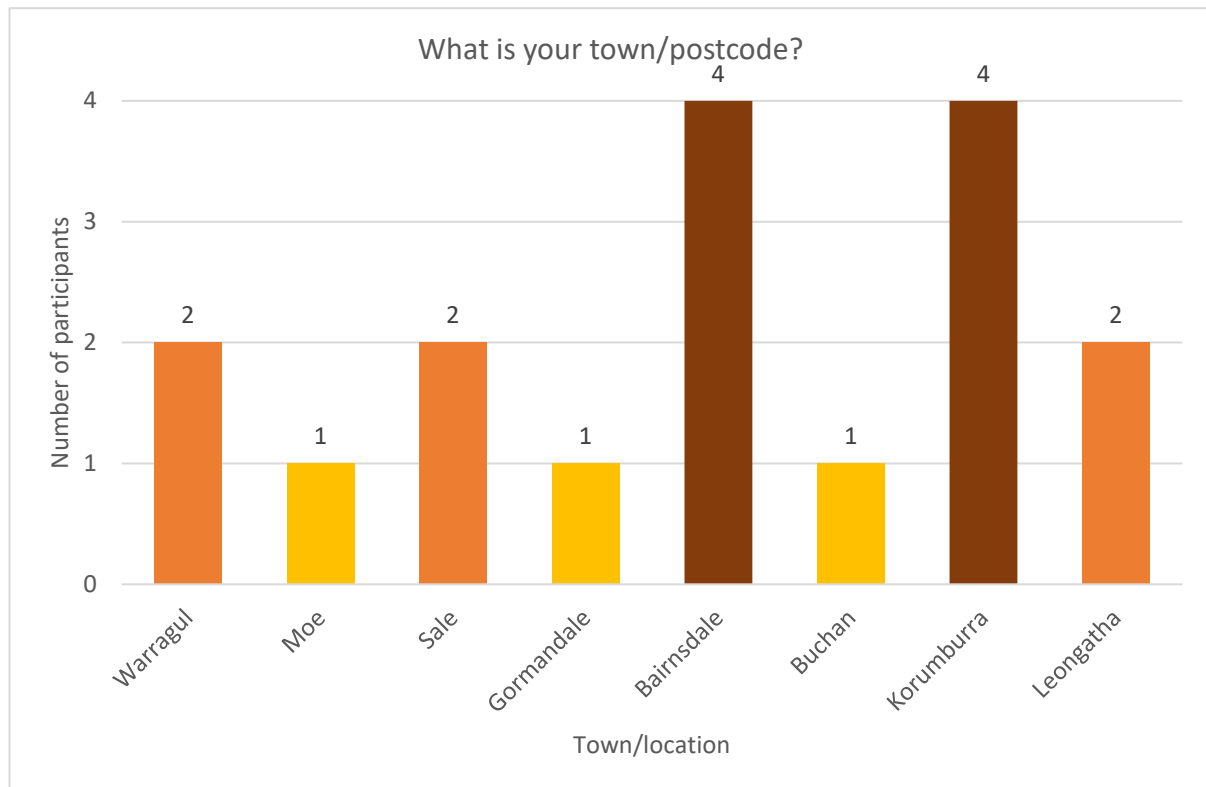
Figure 13: Town/postcode of respondents

Level of agreement or disagreement on five aspects of the program

The program participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with 15 statements, which can be classified into five major aspects.

The first aspect was the participants' ability to use the information given, and knowledge gained, reflected in statements 1 and 2 (Figure 14), followed by the seven reasons why the participant liked or disliked the program (statements 3 to 9 in Figures 15 and 16). The third aspect was in relation to networking, indicated in statements 10 and 11 in Figure 17, and the fourth aspect was regarding food and venue in statements 12 and 13 in Figure 18. Finally, the usefulness of the program was reflected in statements 14 and 15 in Figure 19.

First, the participants positively rated their ability to use the information given and knowledge gained through the program. A total of 68% (n=17) and 64% (n=16) respondents agreed with the statements 1 and 2, respectively.
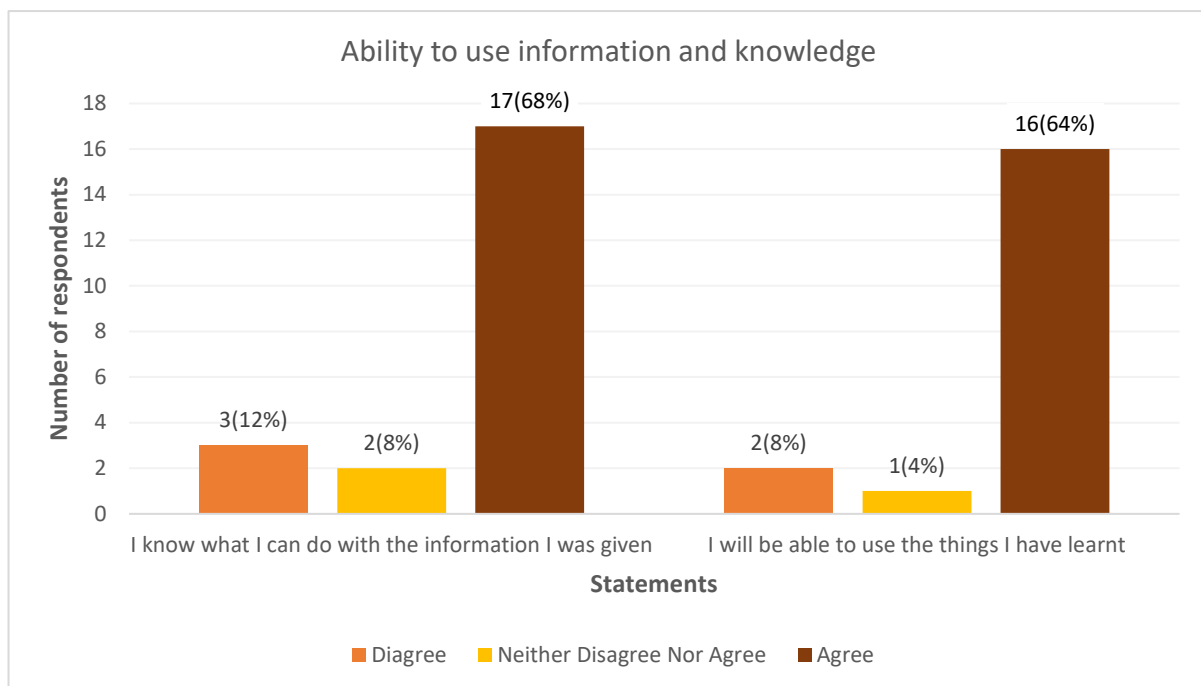
Figure 14: Ability to use information and knowledge

In the second aspect of the program, the seven reasons why the participants liked and disliked the program were discussed in two parts. The first part focused on their level of enjoyment of the program, satisfaction with the presenters' information and their opportunity to raise their ideas during the program. A total of 88% (n=22) of the participants expressed their enjoyment with the program (statement 3), while the remaining 12% (n=2) did not respond to this statement. Similarly, 72% of the respondents agreed that the presenters had a lot of information (statement 4), and the same proportion agreed that they were able to talk about their ideas (statement 5).
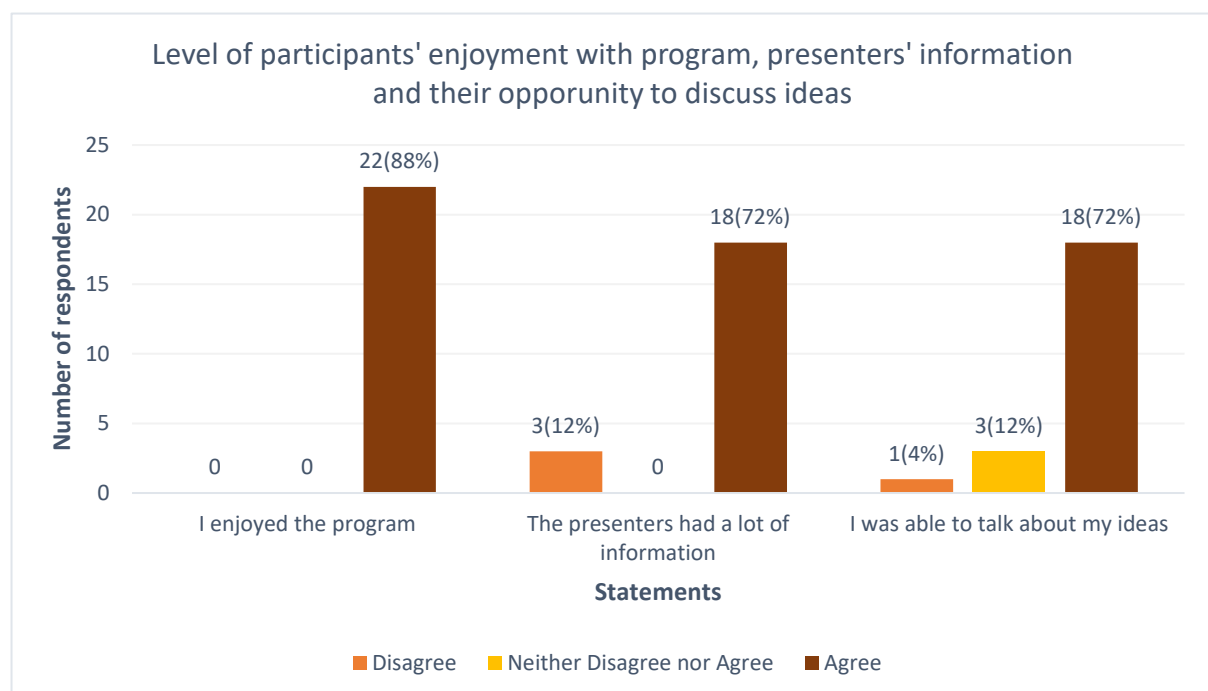
Figure 15: Level of participants' enjoyment with the program, presenters' information and their opportunity to discuss ideas

Other positive results lay in statements 6, 7, and 8 (the second part of the reason aspect), indicated in Figure 16 below, with slightly slower proportions compared to statements 3, 4, and 5, shown in Figure 15 above. Slightly more than half (n=14, 56%) of the respondents disagreed with statement 6, *"The topics were hard to understand."* Less than one-third (n=7, 28%) agreed with statement 6, and the remaining 16% chose not to respond to this statement.

Slightly less than half (n=12, 48%) of the respondents disagreed with statement 7, "*I don't know why we did the activities*". Almost one-third (n=8, 32%) agreed with statement 7, and 12% (n=3) chose "*Neither disagree nor disagree*" with this statement. Similarly, a total of 48% (n=12) disagreed with statement 8, *"The program was too long,"* while one-fifth (n=5, 20%) agreed with statement 8, and 12% (n=3) chose *"Neither disagree nor disagree."*

Statement 9, *"I don't have enough time to talk with others about the topics,"* reflected the negative result. 36% (n=9) agreed with this statement, and only 28% (n=7) disagreed. One-fifth (n=5) chose *"Neither disagree nor disagree"* to this statement. These results suggested that participants needed more time to discuss some topics with others.
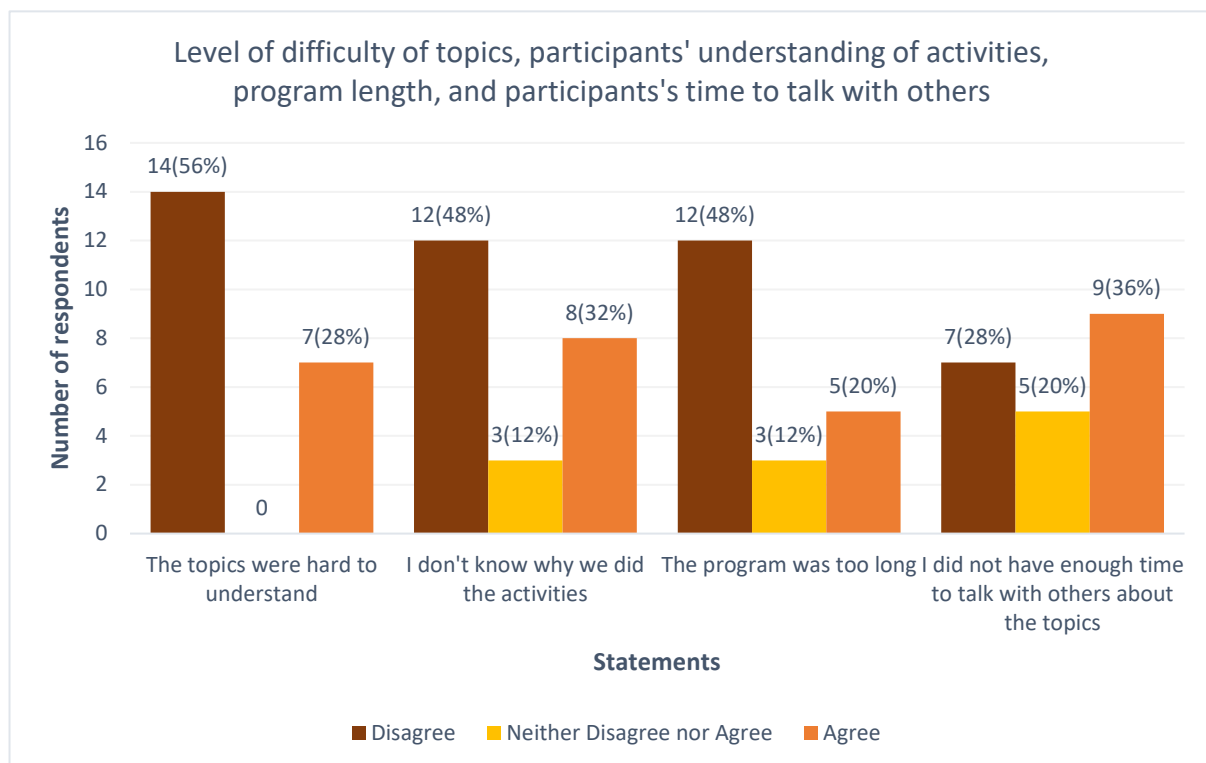
Figure 16: Level of difficulty of topics, participants' understanding of activities, program length, and participants' time to talk with others

The respondents provided positive feedback regarding the networking aspect**.** A total of 68% (n=17) and 76% (n=19) agreed with statement 10, *"I made some good contacts at the program,"* and statement 11, *"Being able to meet other people was important,"* respectively.
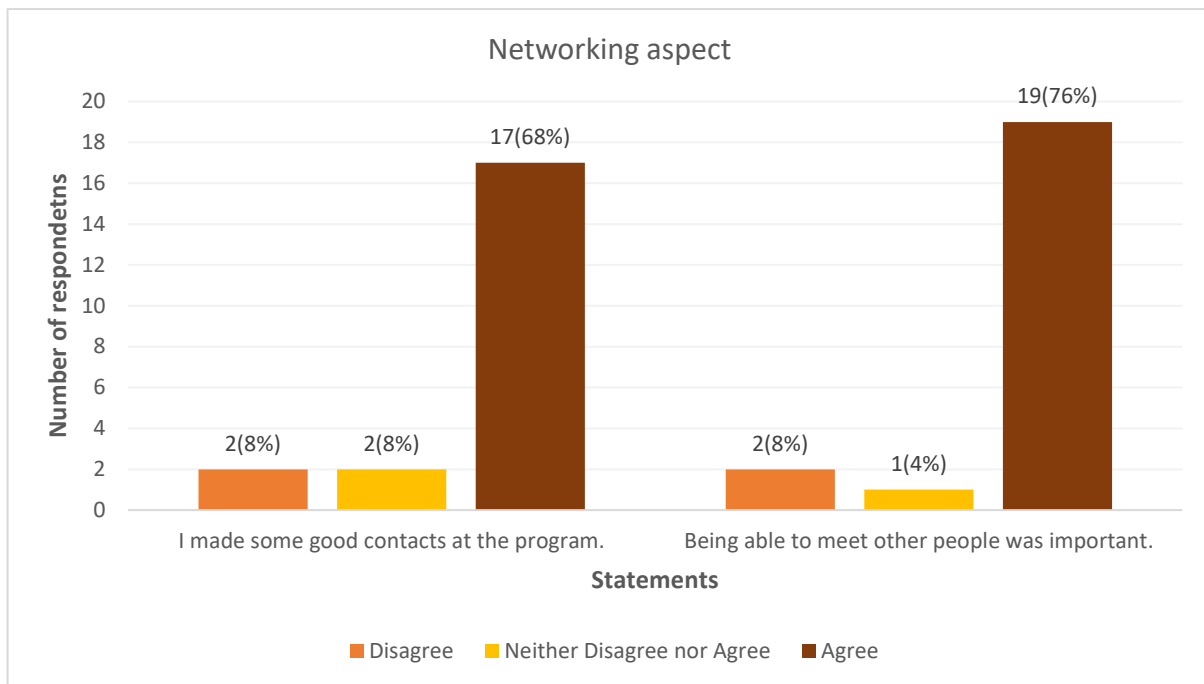
Figure 17: Networking aspect

Slightly less than half (n=12, 48%) of the participants agreed with statement 12, *"The food was good,"* and almost one-third (n=5, 29%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Up to 28% (n=7) of the respondents chose not to respond to this statement.

Regarding the program venue, more than three-quarters (n=19, 76%) agreed with statement 13, *"I like the place the program was held,"* with only 12% (n=3) choosing *"Neither disagree nor agree"* to this statement. These figures suggest a positive result regarding the program venue.
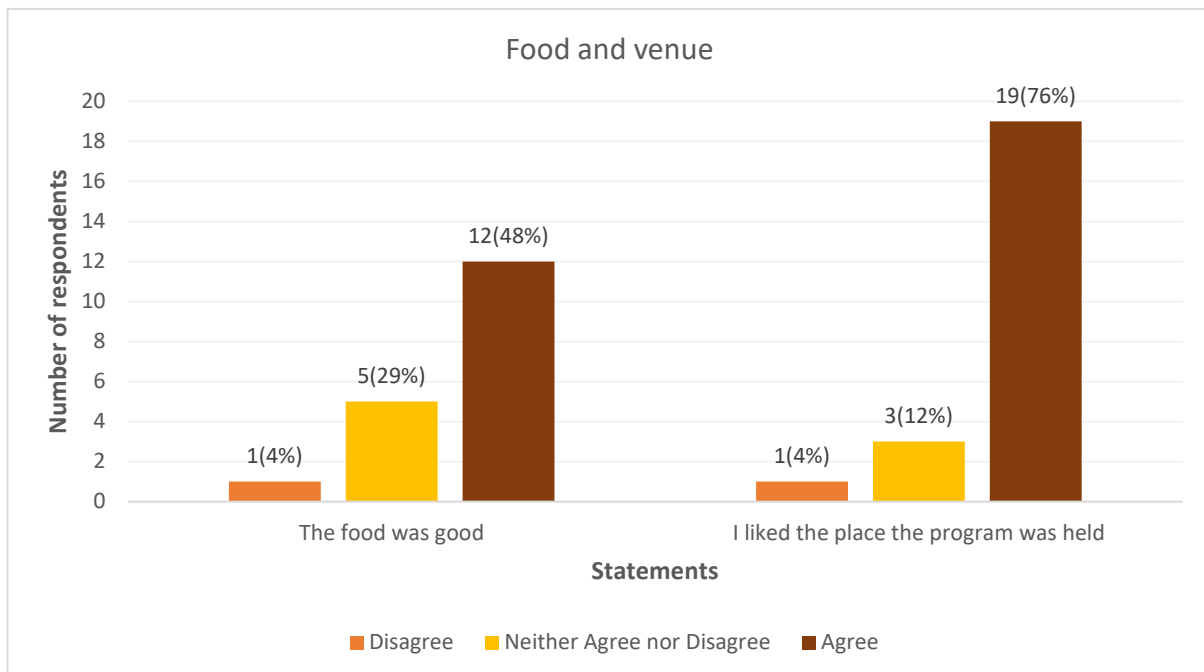
Figure 18: Food and venue

Finally, the largest majority of the respondents found the program useful. This is reflected in 88% (n=22) and 84% (n=21) agreeing with statements 14 and 15, respectively, as shown in Figure 19 below.
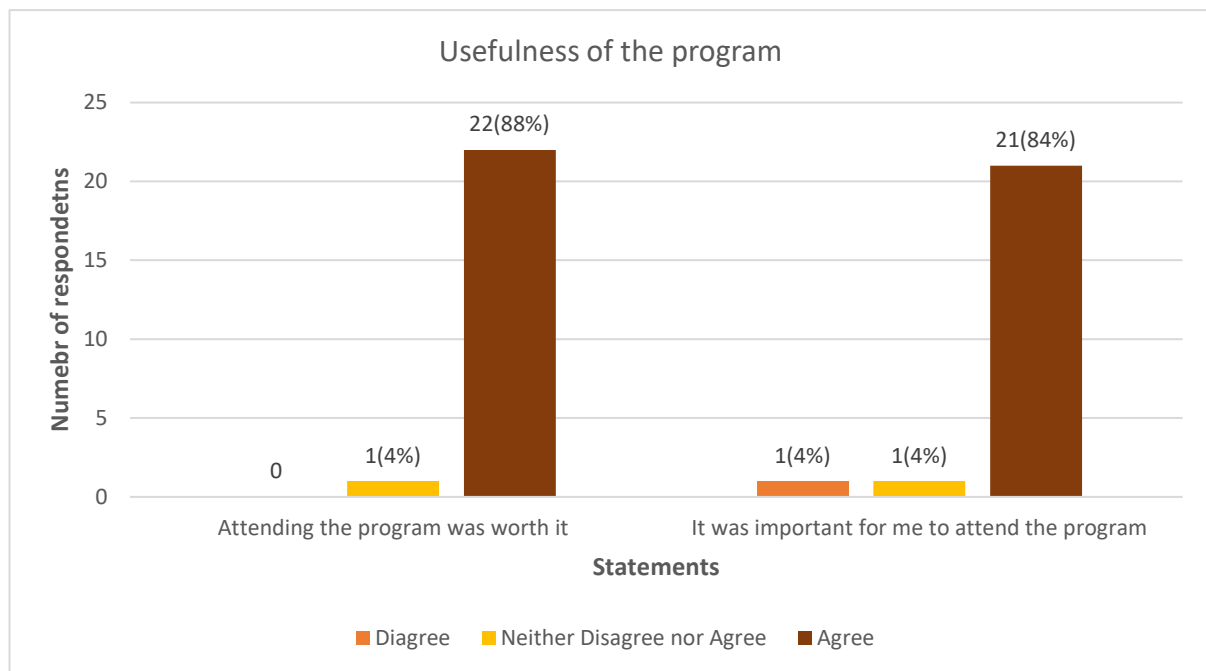
Figure 19: Usefulness of the program

In conclusion, most respondents were satisfied with the program in various aspects illustrated above. However, the three issues identified as requiring improvement are the *time allocation for discussion,* the *food provided or lack thereof*, and the *length* of the training session.

The issue of time allocation was demonstrated in Figure 16; only 28% of participants disagreed with the statement, *"I don't have enough time to talk with others about the topics."* This figure suggested that participants needed more time to discuss some topics with others. This issue was linked to the reason for doing activities during program sessions, reflected in Figure 16. This figure shows that only 48% of the respondents disagreed with the statement, "*I don't know why we did the activities*".

Regarding the issue of food, Figure 18 shows that only 48% of the participants agreed with the statement, *"The food was good."* This issue was also raised in other open-ended questions. For example, three participants suggested that food be provided.

The third issue was reflected in Figure 16 and open-text comments. Slightly less than half of the participants (48%) disagreed with the statement, *"The program was too long."* In their open-text comments, one participant suggested that program sessions should be expanded to a 1–2-day workshop course.

Feelings created by the program

The respondents were asked to choose one of the five colour choices (dark green, light green, yellow, orange, and red) representing how the program made them feel. The evaluators interpreted dark green as *"Very happy"*, light green for *"Happy"*, yellow for *"Feeling OK"*, orange for *"Not happy"*, and red for "Upset". Of the 25 respondents, 24 people agreed to rate their feelings generated by the program. As shown in Figure 20 below, 46% (n=11) chose *"Very happy"* and *"happy"*. If these two responses were combined, the figure was 92%.
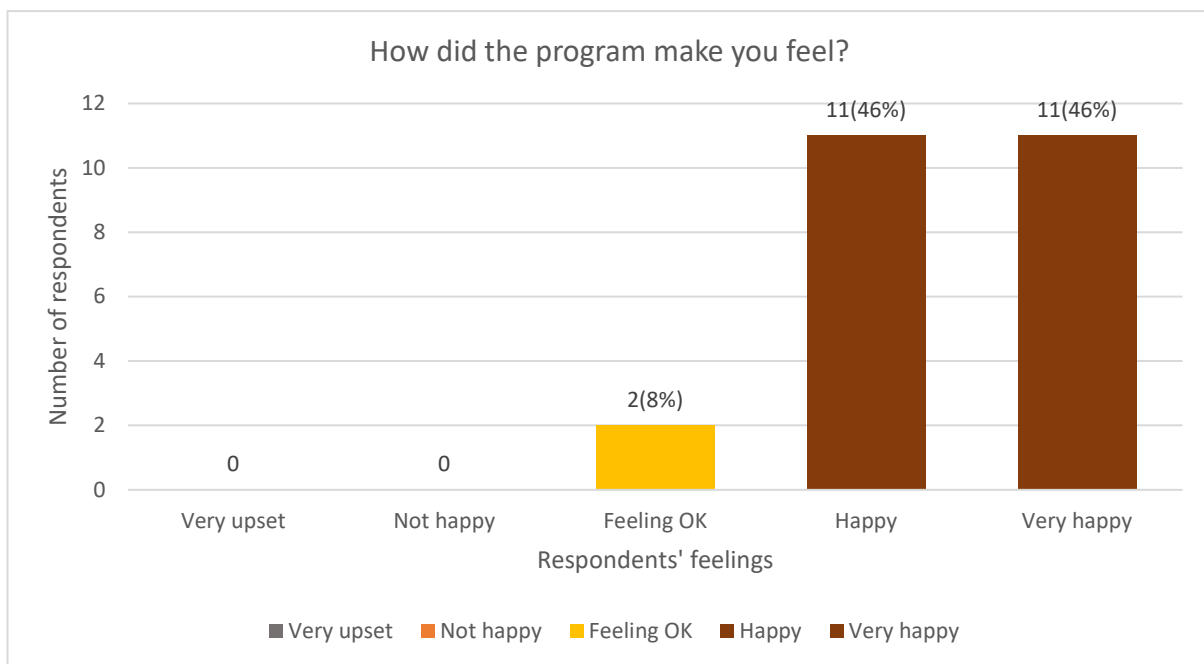
Figure 20: Feelings created by the workshop

The three most important things

Of the 25 respondents who were asked to respond to the question, "*What are the three most important things you learnt today?*" only 11 people agreed to provide their free-text responses. These responses were around:

- Usefulness of videos.
- Importance of being kind, consent, and respect.
- How to be safe and opportunities to talk about problems.
- Understanding that forced sterilisation was still legal here.
- Necessity of communication with supported independent living (SIL) staff.
- Availability of different kinds of services/options with people with disabilities.
- How to support peers or other people with disabilities.

What was the best part of the workshop?

Of the 25 respondents who agreed to provide their free-text responses to the question "*What was the best part of the program?*" only 14 participants responded to this question. While one participant said, *"Thank you for supporting us,"* three participants responded, "*I enjoyed it all."* Other responses were around:

- *"Meeting with other people in the disability support community".*
- *"Learning new things that they didn't know about, including information, stories, and handouts".*
- *"Opportunities to talk about their stories and discuss with others".*
- *"Food".*

Willingness to use what has been learnt

Of 25 participants, 24 agreed to answer, "*Will you use what you learnt today?*" Three-quarters (n=18, 75%) of the participants chose *"Yes"* to this question, and only 21% (n=5) chose *"I don't know."* These figures suggest a positive result (Figure 21).
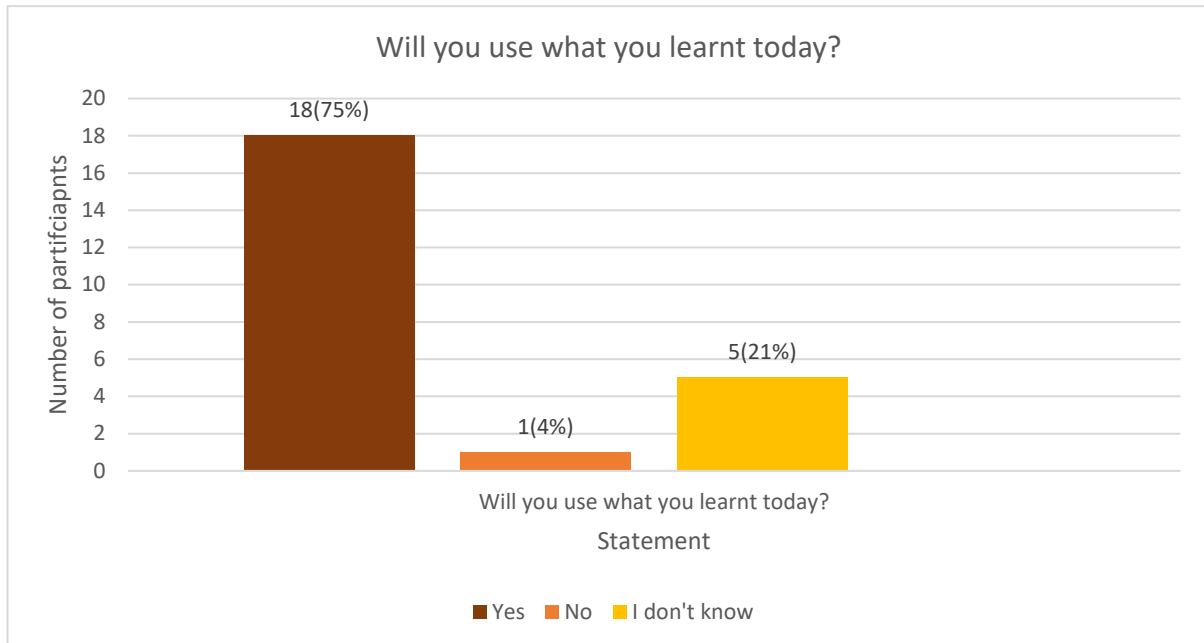

Figure 21: Willing to use the what learnt from the program

How do you think we could make the event better?

A total of 14 of the 25 participants agreed to provide their comments on areas for improvement. Three of these 14 participants said they had no feedback to improve the program. Other responses were as follows:

- Three participants suggested food be provided. This feedback suggested that food was not provided in some training sessions.
- *"More activities and trying different things".*
- One participant suggested training sessions should be expanded to a 1–2-day workshop course.
- One suggested a bigger group for training sessions.
- More individualised support should be provided to participants.
- *"A training venue should be somewhere near an open café".*

6.2 FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPANTS

Professionals who attended workshops, information sessions, and Café Catch-Up meetings were also asked to provide their feedback on these workshops/events. In total, 58 respondents participated and completed this feedback survey questionnaire.

Of the 58 respondents, 55 agreed to provide their demographic information. The largest majority (80%, n=44) of the participating respondents were women, and a small minority (13%, n=7) were men. Two participants identified themselves as non-binary, and two did not state their gender, as shown in Figure 22.
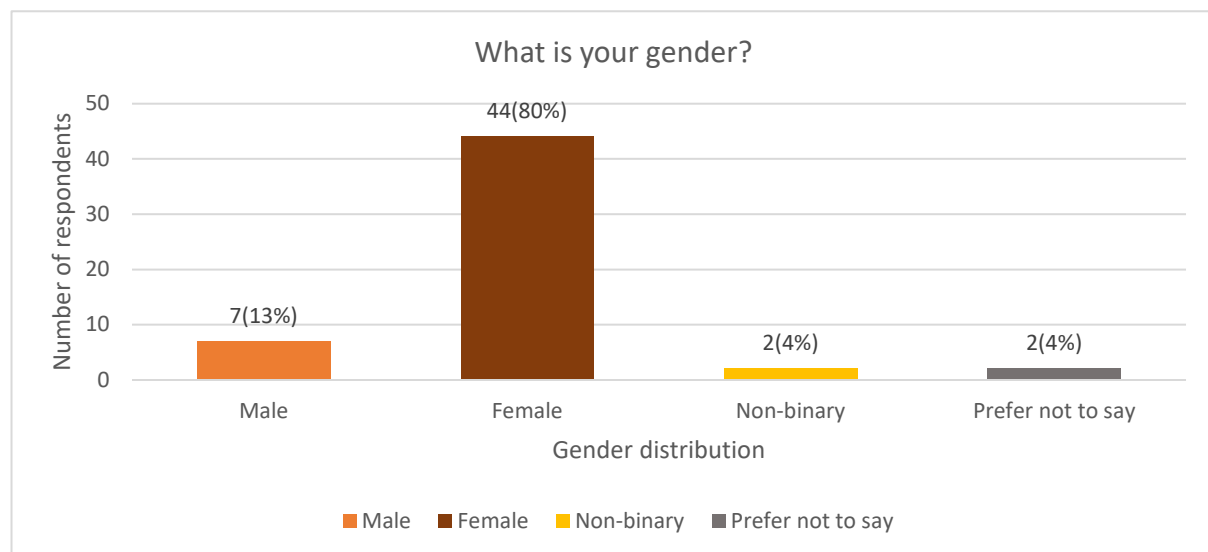
Figure 22: Gender distribution

A total of 49 out of 58 survey respondents agreed to provide information about their age. The participants varied in age, with a majority between the ages of 35-44 (33%, n=16), followed by the 25-34 (31%, n=15) and 45-54 age groups (27%, n=13). The proportions of the 18-24 and 55-64 groups were 6% (n=3) and 4% (n=2), respectively, as shown in Figure 23.
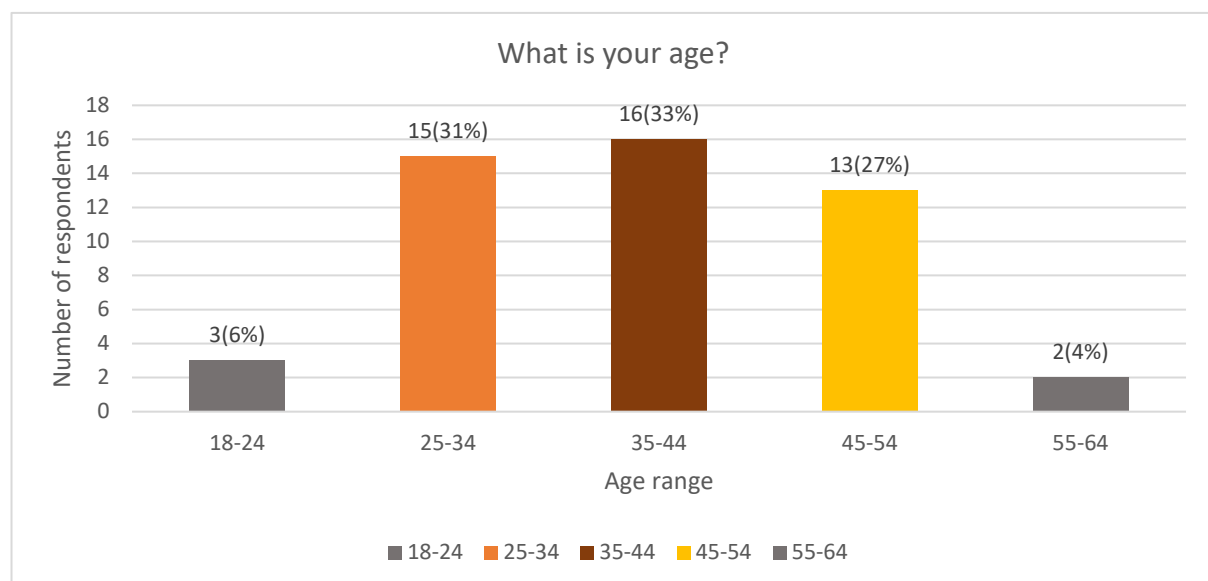
Figure 23: Age of survey respondents

Geographical information

Of the 58 respondents, 52 agreed to indicate which town/postcode they lived in. The survey respondents came from 21 different postcode areas. The top three postcodes were Morwell (3840, n=6), Leongatha (3953, n=6), and Drouin (3818, n=5). These were followed by five other postcodes, with each having four participants: Warragul (3820, n=4), Moe (3825, n=4), Traralgon (3844,n=4), Korumburra (3950, n=4), and Wonthaggi (3995, n=4).

Officer (3809) and Bairnsdale (3875) had two participants, and the other 11 postcodes had only one participant (Dandenong, Wallan, Avonmore, Pakenham, Trafalgar, Churchill, Rosedale, Mirboo North, Woodside, Cowes and Loch), as shown in Figure 24.
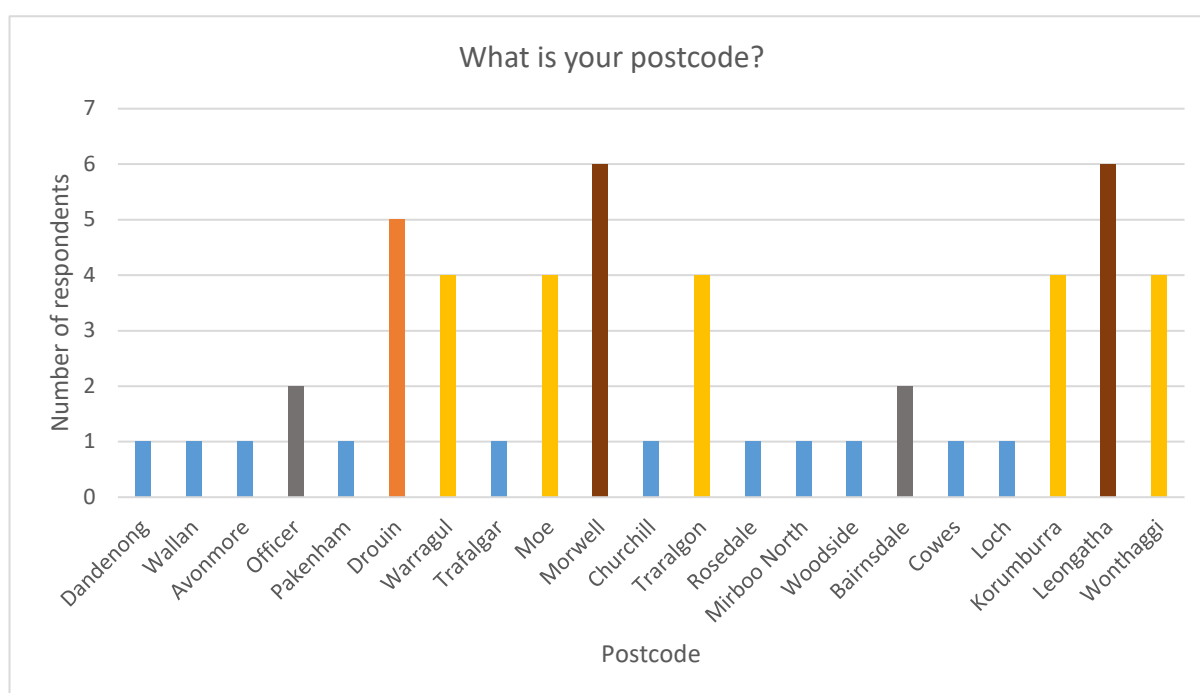
Figure 24: Postcode/town of respondents

Level of agreement or disagreement on five aspects of the program

The workshop participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each of the 15 statements, which can be classified into five major aspects.

The first aspect was the participants' ability to use the information given, and knowledge gained, reflected in statements 1 and 2 (Figure 25), followed by the seven reasons why the participant liked or disliked the program (statements 3 to 9 in Figures 26 and 27). The third aspect was in relation to networking, indicated in statements 10 and 11 in Figure 28, and the fourth aspect was regarding food and venue in statements 12 and 13 in Figure 29. Finally, the usefulness of the program was reflected in statements 14 and 15 in Figure 30.

First, the participants positively rated their ability to use the information given and knowledge gained through the program. A total of 95% (n=55) of respondents agreed with statements 1 and 2.
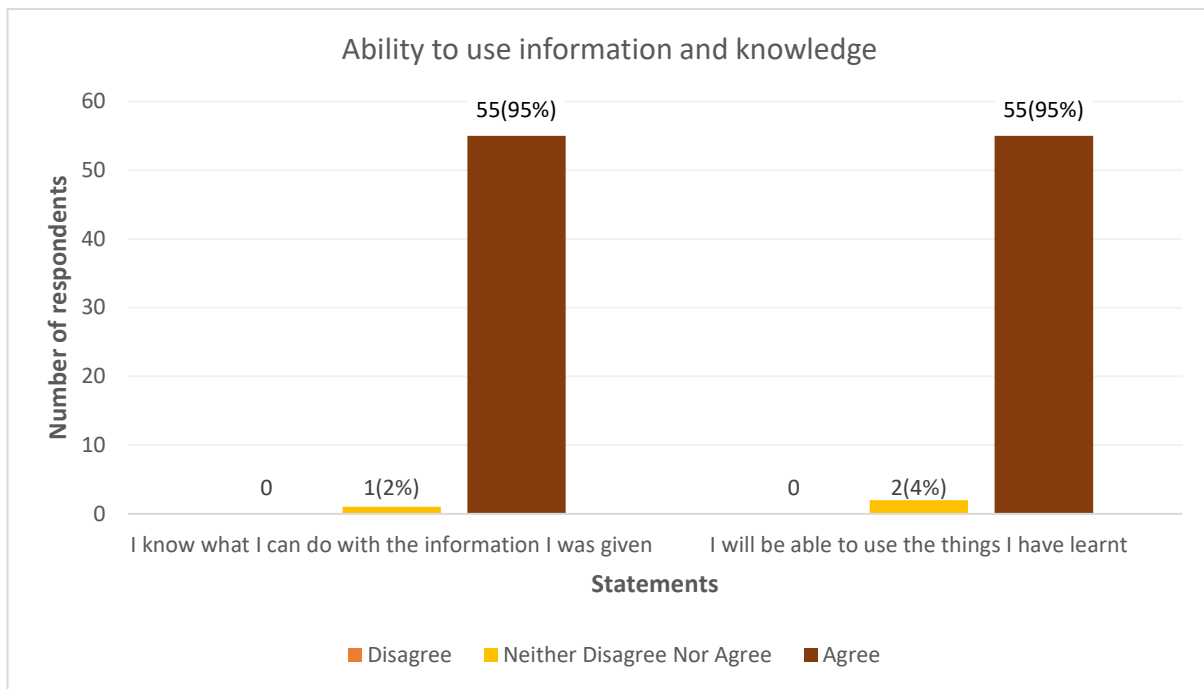
Figure 25: Ability to use information and knowledge

In the second aspect of the program, the seven reasons the participants liked and disliked the program were discussed in two parts. The first part focuses on their level of enjoyment of the program, satisfaction with the presenters' information and their opportunity to raise their ideas during the workshop. Almost all respondents (n=57, 98%) expressed their enjoyment with the program (statement 3), and 97% (n=56) agreed that the presenters had a lot of information (statement 4). The proportion of agreement has slightly decreased regarding their ability to talk about their ideas, with only 72% (n=24) agreeing with statement 5. Almost a quarter (25%, n=14) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.
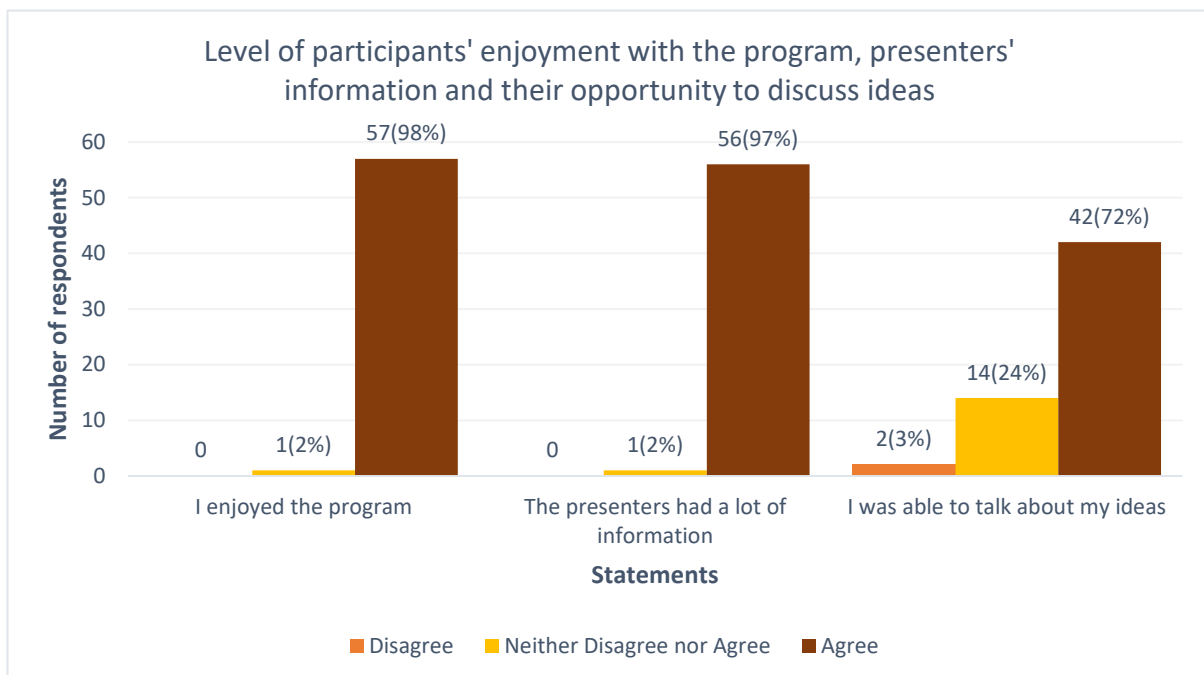

Figure 26: Level of participants' enjoyment with the program, presenters' information and their opportunity to discuss ideas

The second part of the reason aspect also indicated positive results, illustrated in a higher level of disagreement in statement 6, "*The topics were hard to understand*" (90%, n=52), and statement 7, "*I don't know why we did the activities*" (88%, n=51). However, the level of disagreement with the negative statements had decreased modestly regarding the duration of the program (statement 8) and the time available for the participants to discuss with other participants (statement 9). While 78% (n=45) of participants disagreed with statement 8, *"The program was too long",* only 50 % (n=29) respondents disagreed with statement 9, *"I did not have enough time to talk with others about the topics."* More than one-third (36%, n=21) of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with statement 9, suggesting that they may have needed more time to discuss some topics with others.
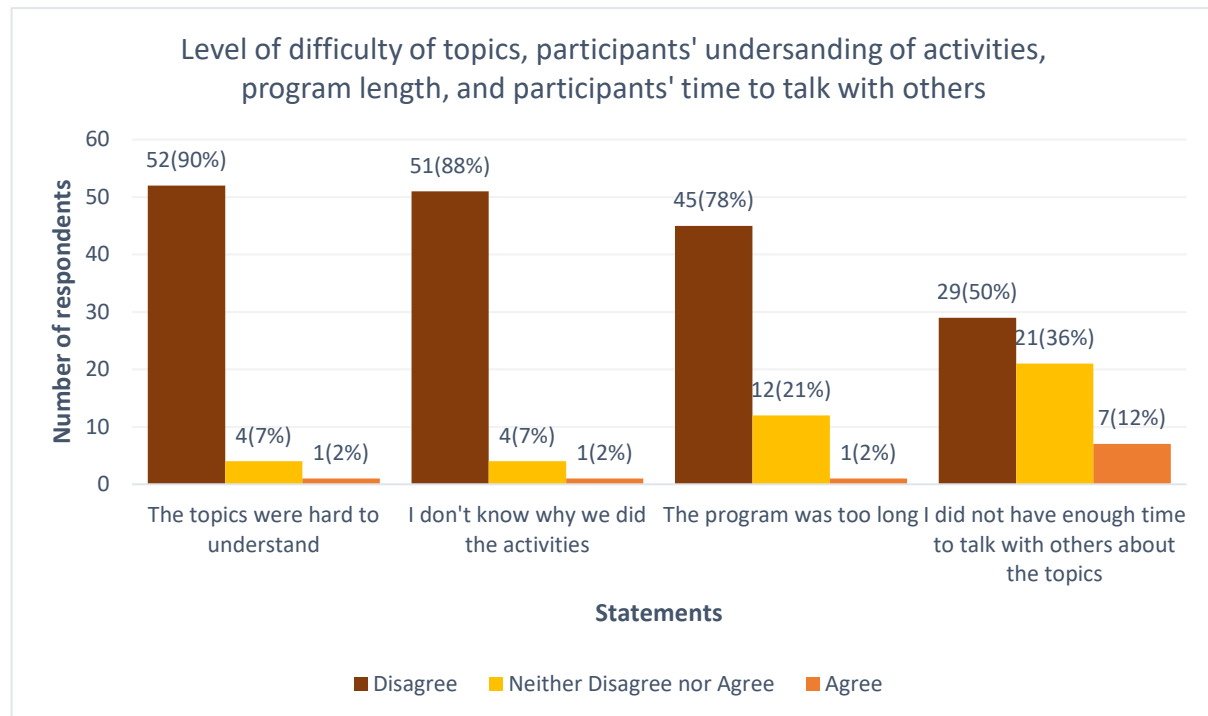

Figure 27: Level of difficulty of topics, participants' understanding of activities, program length, and participants' time to talk with others

The respondents provided positive feedback regarding the networking aspect*.* A total of 95 % (n=55) agreed with statement 11, "*Being able to meet other people was important*." This figure had slightly decreased to 76% (N=44), who agreed that they made some good contacts at the workshop (statement 10). Almost one-quarter (24%) neither agreed nor disagreed with statement 10.
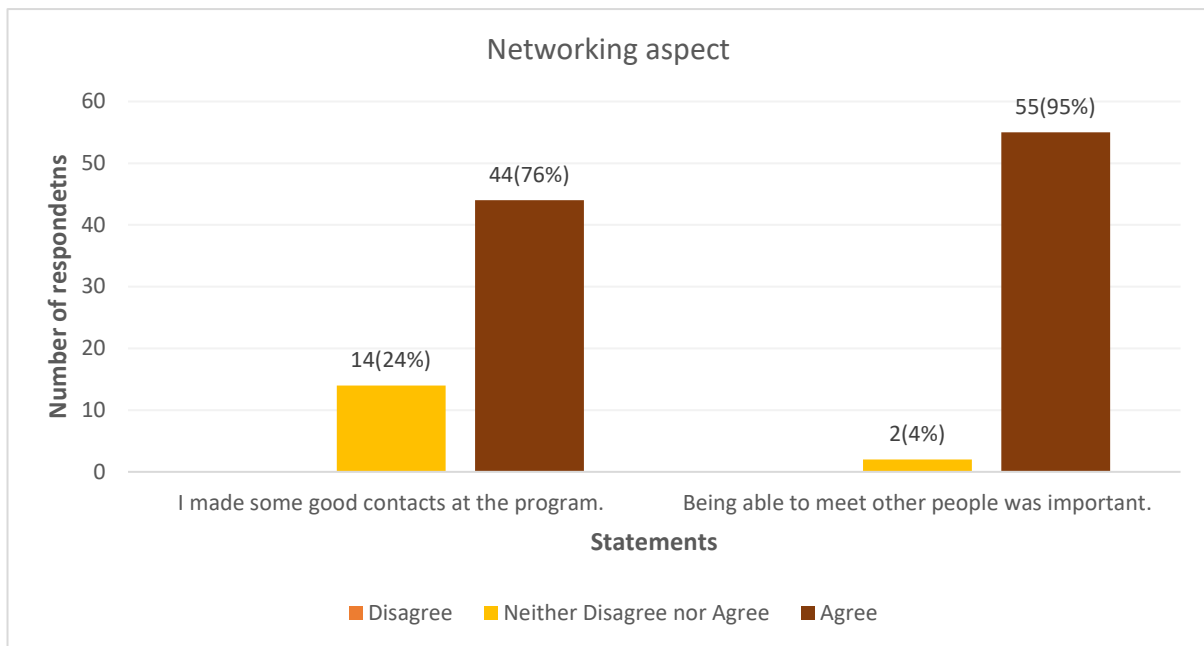
Figure 28: Networking aspect

Whilst the majority (81%, n=40) liked the food, reflected in agreement with statement 12, only 62% (n=36) liked the *program venue* (statement 13). The proportion of people who disagreed, neither agreed nor disagreed with statement 13 was the same at 21% (n=12).
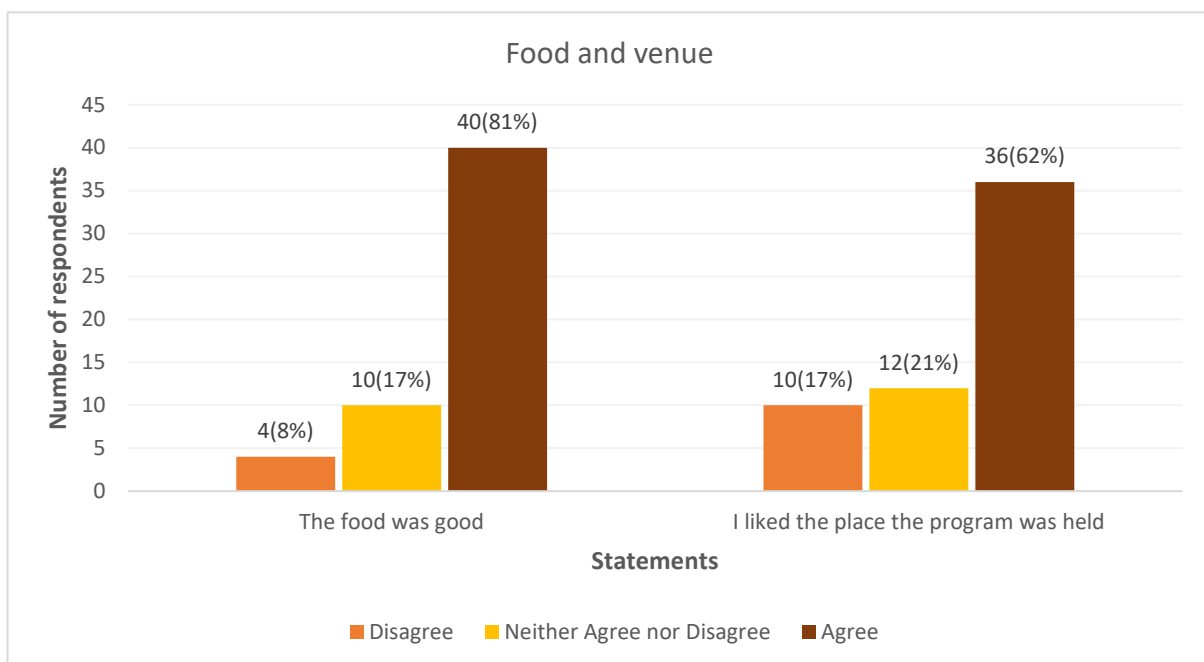

Figure 29: Food and venue

Finally, the largest majority of the respondents found the program useful. This was reflected in 95% (n=56) and 91% (n=53) agreeing with statements 14 and 15, respectively, as shown in Figure 30 below.
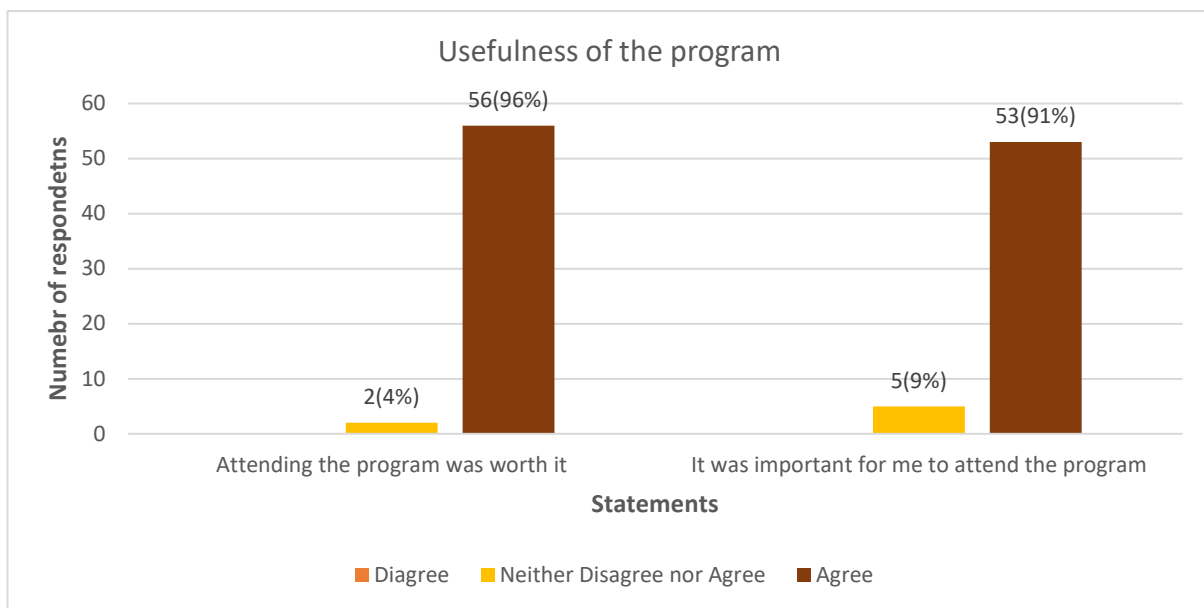
Figure 30: Usefulness of the program

In conclusion, most respondents were satisfied with the program in various aspects illustrated above. Nevertheless, one issue requiring improvement was the *allocated time for the participants* to discuss some topics with others. As shown in Figure 27, only half of the respondents disagreed with the statement, *"I did not have enough time to talk with others about the topics."* More than one-third (36%) of them neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement, indicating that they may need more time to discuss some topics with others.

Feelings created by the program

The respondents were asked to choose one of the five colour choices (dark green, light green, yellow, orange, and red) representing how the workshop made them feel. The CERC evaluation team interpreted dark green as "*Very happy*", light green for "*Happy*", yellow for "*feeling OK*", orange for "*Not happy*", and red for "*Upset*". Of the 58 respondents, 51 people agreed to rate their feelings generated by the program. As shown in Figure 31 below, 47% (n=24) and 33% (n=17) chose "*Very happy*" and "*happy*", respectively. Close to one-fifth (18%, n=9) chose "*feeling OK*".
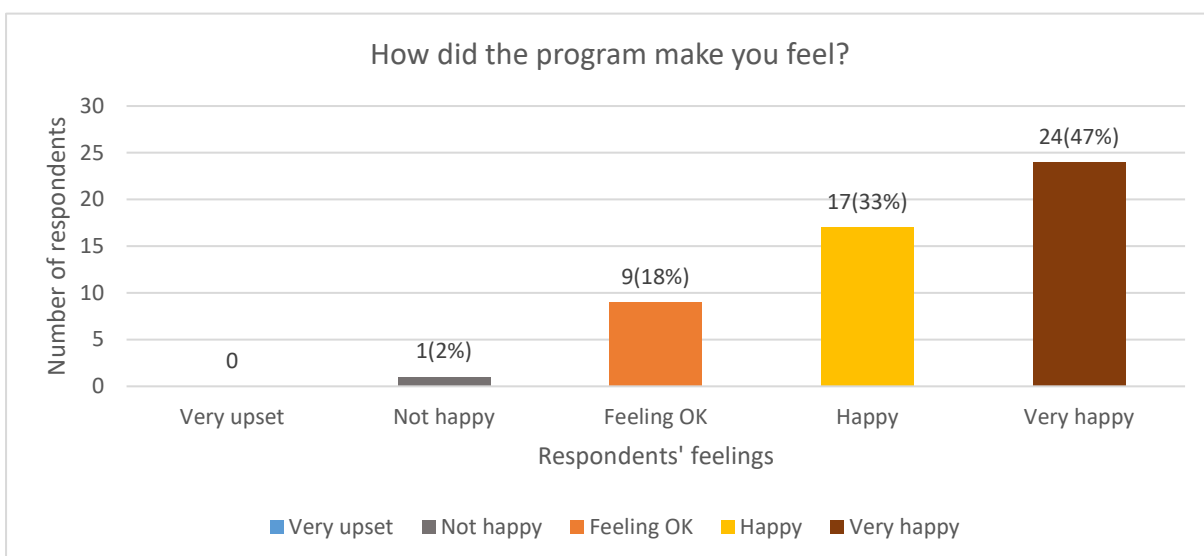

Figure 31: Feelings created by the program

The three most important things

Of the 58 respondents who were asked to respond to the question, "What are the three most important things you learnt today?" 33 people agreed to provide their free-text responses. The evaluators coded each respondent's comments and grouped these coded comments under each emerging theme. The recurring themes were around four issues: (1) *awareness about programs, support and/or resources,* (2) *lived experiences,* (3) *inclusiveness*, and (4) *the importance of avoiding assumptions.*

A total of 18 respondents commented that their awareness of programs, support and/or resources for young people and people with disabilities and/or experiencing sexual assault was one of the most important things they learnt from the workshop. As one participant stated, "[It was] *resources for practitioners working with individuals experiencing sexual violence*". Another said, "[It was] *programs"* and *"resources that I didn't know existed*". One participant stated, "[It was] *services for disabilities and sexual assault*".

A total of six people stressed the importance of lived experience stories in the program. One respondent stated, "*Lived experiences provide real-life examples for practitioners to learn from*". Other respondents acknowledged that "*Having Peer Educators with lived experience is really important*". One participant outlined "*Hearing from peer support and lived experience grateful for their stories and sharing*" as one of their free-text statements.

One respondent expressed their understanding of the importance of the inclusiveness aspect in a question form: "*What do we provide for consumers to ensure they are safe, informed and have accessibility to/within our service? What do we ensure? Are we inclusive? What supports can we provide to a walk-in client?".* One respondent acknowledged that the "*level of disconnecting*" [between clients and practitioners is] "*still occurring*". The stakeholder participants suggested that the focus should be on listening to clients and believing in them.

Other benefits of attending the program as outlined by stakeholder participants included making contacts, staying connected and understanding the myths around people's rights and sexuality.

What was the best part of the program?

A total of 36 of the 58 participants agreed to provide their free-text responses to the question, *"What was the best part of the program?"*

Thirteen considered the *lived experiences* of Peer Educators and/or presenters the best part of the program. Connected to the *"lived experience"* theme, six people specifically appreciated the skills and knowledge of the Peer Educators and/or presenters. As discussed earlier, lived experience stories were among the three most important things of the workshop. Reading the responses to these two questions together suggested that the lived experience stories of facilitators/presenters/speakers were crucial for the program.

Other comments included their awareness of programs and processes for supporting people with disabilities and the knowledge they gained from the program. They also stressed that this knowledge can be applied to other similar sectors. One participant expressed that they would go out and teach other people. The program environment, discussion times, networking, and videos were emphasised as important. Some respondents noted the importance of appropriate language and a nonjudgmental attitude.

Willingness to use what has been learnt

Of the 58 participants, 56 agreed to answer, "*Will you use what you learnt today?*" As shown in Figure 32 below, most participants (96%) chose "*Yes*" to this question, while 4% chose "I don't know" at the time of the survey.
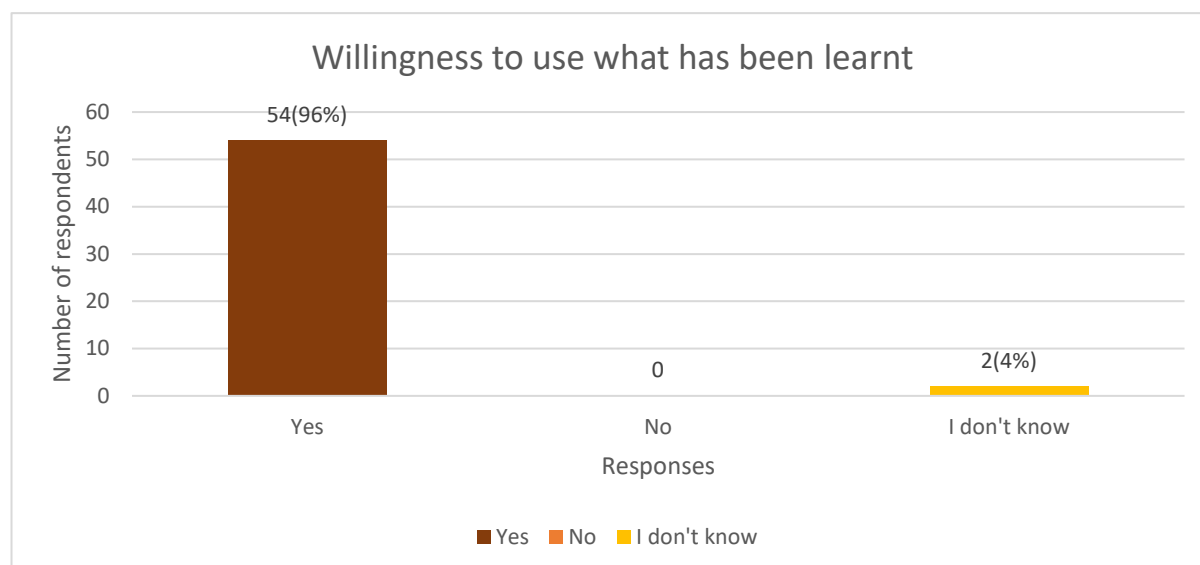

Figure 32: Willingness to use what has been learnt from the program

How do you think we could make the event better?

Of the 58 respondents, 20 agreed to provide their comments on areas for improvement. Seven of the 20 participants indicated that everything was great and had no further comments. Of these seven participants, one commented that the workshops provided "*a lot of details relevant to our clients and personal experiences*". Thirteen participants provided a few suggestions for improvement.

Three people commented that more interactive activities and/or group discussions could improve the event. The other three people gave their feedback on the room temperature. The issue of the room temperature was mentioned in other questions.

Three people commented on the venue, suggesting quieter and more spacious rooms. Whilst one suggested the workshop be longer, one commented on providing more time for learning other participants' programs. One respondent commented that more detailed information about the resources and/or services was needed.

The following case study describes the experience of stakeholders involved in the SL&RR program. This case study was provided by the SL&RR team.

Case study 1: Organisation - Staff group at Melba Support Services, staff group response.

In November of 2023, the SL&RR team delivered an adapted version of the program to the staff and supported people in one of their Gippsland houses. The idea was to have supported people and carers in the same room, hearing the same information and having the opportunity to engage in some small group work activities.

The workshop lasted two hours, with Peer Educators, a counsellor advocate, and the Program Developer in the room. The video story about Molly and her desire for independence and equal treatment was shown, followed by a discussion. Additional questions were written for the session to get the staff thinking about their own internal biases and values.

The key themes in Molly's story are:
- Families
- Being a person with a disability
- Being a woman
- Relationships and sex
- Men in Molly's life
- Rights of people with disabilities

Staff feedback from this pilot workshop was very positive. Comments included values such as:
- What to do if someone discloses abuse.
- The value of hearing clients feel comfortable to open up in the space.
- How important the facilitator's stories were.
- The value of the video stories in prompting reflection.
- Supports and resources available to both carers and supported people.
- Hearing from actual people with disabilities and the inclusion of Peer Educators.
- Availability of sex service funding through NDIS.

The overwhelming feeling during and after the session was that it was incredibly eye-opening and valuable to the staff group. Many comments were made about how important it is for them as a collective to understand the rights of their supported people to express themselves in ways that are right for them as individuals and to approach clients as complete human beings with the right to make choices.

The conversation also covered the challenges of working for, and with supported people and valuing their rights whilst also trying to manage often complex requests and relationships with families who may manage client NDIS funding and want to make decisions on behalf of clients. This is a challenge that comes up frequently when the program presents to service providers and support staff.

7. QUALITATIVE DATA

7.1 THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF PROGRAM STAFF

Two GCASA staff were interviewed throughout the duration of the project, providing their perspective on the successes, suggestions, benefits, and barriers to project implementation. One staff member was a Therapeutic Group Work Counsellor, and one was a Program Developer. Both staff were interviewed in August 2023, then a second interview was conducted with the Program Developer in May 2024 to provide a longitudinal perspective. The August 2023 interviews for each staff member lasted approximately 30 – 60 minutes in duration. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using a content analysis technique. Due to small project staff numbers, staff were informed that their identity may not be fully anonymised. Therefore, transcripts were returned to staff for member checking and confirmation of major discussion topics.

First interviews – August 2023

Giving and receiving support

When discussing the SL&RR program with the two GCASA staff, it was clear that safety was the number one priority: safety of staff and of participants attending the programs. This safety was both physical and psychological in nature, with the staff acutely aware of the potential impact of program content delivery:

> "*They're* [the program participants] *receiving information, they've changing their worldview or sort of put things in context, (it) can be a bit unsettling for them, to be present for them, and have that conversation and help them ground themselves and be safe in that situation too.*"

Safety also extended to the GCASA staff and the Peer Educators supporting the delivery of the program, with both the Therapeutic Group Work Counsellor and the Program Developer identifying the importance of supporting each other in a variety of ways. For the Therapeutic Group Work Counsellor, sometimes this meant they would "*jump in with their* [the Peer Educators'] *permission of course to assist in co-facilitating and delivering the content as needed.*" Having this second GCASA staff member present was described as vital, as the Program Developer stated, "*If I'm in that room by myself because I've got my educators, but when I'm in that room, they're also participants, they're also vulnerable.*" This sentiment was echoed by the Therapeutic Group Work Counsellor who outlined:

> "*An extra person that can be therapeutically present. For example, if there's a participant going off and not feeling very safe and then sort of feeling quite unsettled and having someone that can take them aside and have a conversation with them and help them ground. And not having the whole group come to a standstill because there's only one* [Program Developer]. *I think that's where the values been where the rest of the group can continue to feel safe, and* [the Program Developer] *tended to progress.*"

Having this second support staff member "*eased*" challenges, as previously "*until probably six months ago I was doing all the room bookings, payments, photocopying, manuals, admin certificates,*

reminders, planning, like I was it." This support not only assisted in the program delivery of the sessions, but also it encouraged "*another perspective on things and some different input and different ideas on how to do things.*" The GCASA staff described how this support was also experienced from the organisations' CEO who was "*very supportive*":

> "So that's the beautiful thing about [the GCASA CEO] *in our building is that* [they] *hold space in a way that helps you be authentic and feel safe. To be authentic and to be really blunt like a don't have to vet what I say. And* [they] *allow that space without telling me what to do."*

GCASA staff were also adamant about the support provided for the Peer Educators, wanting to ensure they felt safe, informed, and confident to co-deliver the SL&RR program content. The Therapeutic Group Work Counsellor was motivated to upskill the Peer Educators, getting them familiar with shared facilitation:

> "Because a lot of the times if you haven't directly been trained for group delivery, there are things that you tend to miss and you find out why you're delivering some incompatibilities, when people accidentally talk over each other or interrupt each other more than they like. And or they might have certain styles of delivery that the other person might not expect. And then they're like some people can feel a little bit unsettled when they're co-facilitator is delivering a certain way. So, all of those things."

The Program Developer would support Peer Educators by "*giving them strategies, talking them through, reminding them that the participants have disabilities too, because sometimes that gets lost and sometimes, I forget, think they forget their own disabilities.*" The GCASA staff outlined that it appeared that all program staff understood their role, capacity, and level of involvement in each step of the program:

> "I think the approach that we have, the Peers are absolutely lovely. They don't pretend to know anyone else's life and neither do we. We just here for conversations."

The GCASA staff were excited to witness the growth and confidence in the Peer Educators throughout the program delivery. They described how the Peers "*asked for official supervision, which is incredible. So once every two months now I do an official one-hour supervision with them."* This support given by the GCASA staff appeared to increase the confidence and competence of the Peer Educators, who were now ready to take on more responsibility within the program:

> "I look at the Peer Educators now to where they were 12 months ago and we've gone from this rabble who turn in the room looking for direction and looking to me constantly, to a group who go, you go, we'll do this. Can we please have trauma informed training? Can we please have supervision? Can we please learn about this?"

GCASA staff were proud of the achievements of the Peer Educators, who outlined what the program had done for them personally, "[they] *learned about* [their] *own disability and learned to accept it the other day,* [they] *said to me, I finally accept that it just is. And I'm actually kind of glad this is where I've ended up."* It was evidence that formal and informal support mechanisms that scaffolded the SL&RR program were essential to its success, with GCASA staff demonstrating that through this support, both themselves and their Peer Educator colleagues could thrive and deliver the program in the most effective way.

Barriers faced when delivering the SL&RR program

GCASA staff discussed several barriers they had experienced or witnessed in the delivery of the SL&RR program, which may have impacted its intended reach and impact. The Therapeutic Group Work Counsellor discussed the difficulties in facilitating group sessions with initially small attendance numbers. Furthermore, they discussed the barriers that could be faced in existing biases within society:

> *"Attendance can be quite a challenge but I think, because of the content of the programme that we deliver it comes with peoples' own biases. So that bias can get in the way of, you know, letting the information reach people who actually need it or, like families and carers and things like that, their own views of what people with disability should be doing and should be receiving information for. I think that can get in the way of passing that information forward to people they actually need to reach for sure."*

With the evidence of potential biases impacting the attendance for the program, the GCASA staff outlined their preference for content to be for people with an intellectual disability rather than for their family members or carers. They described how family members or carers weren't invited in unless "*they* [participants] *wanted one of the carers to actually be in the room with them."* Staff outlined how some family members or carers would push back against the content *"if they just absolutely can't get their head around it"*, however staff were supportive and gentle when approaching this conversation:

> *"We had the conversation with the parents said, OK, this can be information they might not have heard before. And having someone that's from the family, it can be quite challenging for them to actually openly discuss these things, not because you're a bad person but purely because of the role that you play in their lives, and you've been wonderful in protecting them and looking after their needs and things like that."*

The GCASA staff were cognisant of the barriers faced when delivering program content that was often new or previously unexplored by family, carers, program participants and the supporting local organisations. Staff were motivated to work through these barriers to ensure that all people in the LGA with an intellectual disability could access the program content if they so choose.

> **GCASA STAFF CASE STUDY**
>
> I think my experience is when we go and speak to support workers or allied health or medical staff, 9 times out of 10 they watch even the really low level Molly story and they look really affected. It really opens up those internal biases and gets them reflecting on how they talk. We even had one mum, the feedback, the quote I've put in the annual report, is 'this information section really made me reflect on whether I'm inadvertently sometimes not allowing my daughter her own rights'. And this is a mum who's really proactive, whose daughter knows about contraception and autonomy and consent and lives independently.
>
> So to have that impact on a mum, even just with Molly's story, to me that's enormous. Like that's where the win is because people are reflecting. Or we had two medical students come hang out with us for an afternoon with [the Peer Educators] and their doing their postgraduate programme. The male one said, you know what, I had never thought of any of this. I had never once thought that there were so many layers to working with people with disability. So he's now going to take that back to his classroom, to his lecturers, to his practise, to the other people he works with.
>
> That almost has more value. Not that you can compare, but that has as much if not more value than three people in a room for four sessions that we then don't follow up.

Important considerations in program delivery

There were several important considerations the GCSASA staff outlined as impactful to the program's delivery and success. Although additional program information sessions facilitated through the Café Catch-Up's could "*stretch*" staff further, it was identified as a place "*where the groups bond… (take) time getting to know each other and find that comfort.*" The Therapeutic Group Work Counsellor outlined the importance of the sessions for potential participants, "*actually hearing it* [program content] *and getting a taste of the kind of topics that we would cover.*" Furthermore, the Program Developer echoed the importance of a more informal session in the Café Catch-Up:

> "*We also get around that* [Café Catch-Ups] *as a deliverable because we take brochures and business cards and expressions of interest, and we invite support workers, we invite family, so they're really good.*"

These more informal catch-up sessions not only benefited potential program participants, but support for the program through networking occurred. Formal connections were made from this networking that bolstered the program's support and success, "*we then had two staff members come and do facilitator training on the back of that* [Café Catch-Up session] *and they're really supportive of us now.*

Considerations of how the program might affect some participants as well as the Peer Educators were also highlighted by GCASA staff as important to monitor ongoing. Staff highlighted how they would deliver important content that may positively change the views and behaviours of participants.

GCASA staff also discussed the frequency of disclosures and subsequent referrals into the GCASA service that were made by program participants regarding experiences of sexual assault or abusive behaviours, *"So for the last four referrals, I've done one referral for every program we've run recently."* This high frequency of disclosures identified to staff that having the program facilitated by GCASA was beneficial, as it meant that the time from disclosure to the participant receiving support was lessened. Participants could find support in a timely and safe manner:

> *"There are times where we have people and we've actually had participants who were in the PREP* [SL&RR] *program and through that they realised that some of the events in their life constituted of sexual assault. And through that they came into the GCASA service."*

These disclosures also highlighted to the GCASA staff the need for all staff and program support workers to have training in recognising, reporting, and supporting program participants to get connected with GCASA services. Having more GCASA staff involved in the SL&RR program was highlighted as a potential consideration that would support participants further, *"the more the GCASA staff are involved, the more understanding they have, the better they can manage these clients when they're working with them."* This connection to GCASA and the SL&RR program was also described as needing to be mutual, with existing GCASA clients with a disability provided the option to connect to the SL&RR program:

> "*The idea is to develop a training programme for the GCASA staff with the peers with some of our stakeholders, to just work with them around some of the differences in managing these clients. Because we know 40% of our GCASA clients have disabilities but 40% of them aren't being referred to (the)* [SL&RR] *program."*

For program participants to be connected to the GCASA service, staff highlighted how this supported participants to "*recognise what happened… putting a name to the experience and actually then be connected to a sexual assault service."* Furthermore, whether the content delivered in the program was something participants were receiving "*for the first time"* or whether it was something they were already aware of, the benefits of the program were tangible and vital, giving the clients "*more confidence*" in their understanding of sexual lives and respectful relationships. The Therapeutic Group Work Counsellor recounted a conversation with a participant who stated:

> *"I know this already, it's good to hear this again and know that this is right, and this is how I could keep myself safe. It's not just something that my mum or my teacher told me, this is real and other people think it's real and true."*

Considerations into follow-up for participants who have completed the program, and using informal channels such as the Café Catch-Ups were discussed by the GCASA staff as essential for program success and support for participants ongoing. Additional supports were also recognised in the need for staff to be mindful of participant disclosures during program delivery, and how to support participants in this process, ensuring they were connected to GCASA services. This solidified the benefit of the program being facilitated by GCASA, reducing the time from disclosure to assistance for those impacted.

Advice for future iterations of the program

A major discussion point for the GCASA staff was feedback regarding future iterations of the SL&RR program, and how the program content, delivery, and resources could be adapted to better suit the needs of participants. GCASA staff highlighted that for any new staff coming into the program, *"keep an open mind"*, be ready to "*listen*" rather than coming in to try and "*reinvent the wheel*" or "*take over*":

> *"As I learned over time, people with disability have always just had the choice and power taken away from them. So actually listening to what they think they need, instead of just being like, oh, I know what you need on the first day and then sort of trying to take over that."*

The Program Developer discussed how the program could be adapted to better suit the needs of all participants, staff, and stakeholders. They described making the program sustainable through the re-development of content and broader delivery to a wider professional network that could be "*charged*" out as "*training*" with "*free*" "*support.*" The Program Developer described how "*if we can talk to the support agents, that's where we make the change. And the idea is to make change, to have people's rights respected."* The Program Developer appeared to be considering the long-term impact of the program and how this might look:

> *"If at the end of this project if we put forward a proposal for a new project, not a continuation, but a new project, continuation of funding for a new project with new branding, new name, new content, new manuals, new p&p's (policies and procedures) around how we roll it out and how we deliver it and how we market it and how we manage it. And we get to choose some of those KPI's (key performance indicators) then I think, and GCASA holds it, not just auspices it, but holds it."*

The Program Developer also provided feedback on the other elements of the program and its sustainability, such as *"having program partners and Peer Educators in the same facilitator training does not work"*, therefore specific training that is tailored to the needs of all project partners may be more suitable. Furthermore, the Therapeutic Group Work Counsellor discussed the length of the program delivery, highlighting how less content may allow more room for conversation and discussion of topics. This additional time for conversation could minimise the *"internal monologue in people's head and like 'oh this sounds like my experience' and sort of internally freaking out."* It could also ensure that program content was tailored to participants present in each program delivery:

General additional feedback for the program from the GCASA staff including using the "*newsletter*" more readily as this may provide participants and stakeholders an opportunity to give feedback and sign up to be involved in various events. Staff also provided significant feedback on the re-development of the program resources. One suggestion included making the program's written manual more user friendly, with finger tabs to allow for easy navigation to content. For the program to be sustainable and appropriate for future use. These suggestions were designed to improve the delivery, content, and benefit to participants engaging with the program.

Take home messages from GCASA staff

The GCASA staff sharing their program experiences in August 2023 interviews demonstrated the importance of the SL&RR program and the need for the program to run in future. Staff discussed how "*we're currently the only one running* [the program] *worldwide*", and the program was "*immensely*" important in the Latrobe Valley due to the current statistics on violence in the region:

> "*We're topping the charts for sexual violence and physical violence and drug and alcohol use this quarter in Victoria, there's no better place to do this.*"

When looking at the broader impact of the program on its participants, GCASA staff described how important it was to advocate for minority groups in the Latrobe Valley region:

> "*If this helps push advocacies for people with disability, having good relationships and having rights and all those things, I think it's great. This region needs this. I think there's so much disadvantage in this area that I can't think of any better area in Victoria to sort of have this to be honest.*"

The GCASA staff were passionate about the program and were keen to see it succeed in future. They encouraged program adaptations designed to better support the needs of participants, and demonstrated how the GCASA organisation remained the most suitable location to house the program in its current and future iterations.

Second interview – May 2024

A follow up interview with the Program Developer was undertaken in May 2024 to gain a longitudinal perspective on the program functions, successes, and challenges. The May 2024 interview with the Program Developer lasted approximately 150 minutes in duration, providing a summary of the Program Developer's experiences, and feedback to date, as this iteration of the program was soon to cease operations. The interview was transcribed verbatim and analysed using a content analysis technique.

Evolution of the program and considerations

The Program Developer highlighted that in the original course content, "*there's no clear content around consent anywhere, like there's actually no section on consent*", prompting them to include this in the content delivery. They also discussed including sexual health education content in the course, as they recognised that participants were lacking this information:

> "*It's those kinds of things around it's your money, it's your body, it's your health, you have a right to information, you have a right to understand your body parts and how they work. And we included a 20-minute sexual health session now that I run because we found out we're working with people who didn't know what vulva or a prostate was, or that they had to have Pap smears or breast examinations, cause they're "not allowed to." I think there's a lot of things that need to be different.*"

When discussing how the program delivery had evolved, the Program Developer discussed how the majority of the existing content was "*more rights based*" for example "*It's mostly about the right for people with disabilities to have safe relationships and be free from violence and to have babies is pretty much the focus of the content and the manual.*" The program developed outlined that although this content was extremely important, in the current resources there was "*no discussion around what that might look like if you have no support or minimal capacity*":

> "*I think we do them* [program participants] *a disservice when we spend so much time focusing on their right to be parents, because that's not their main issue. Their main issue is probably lifelong systemic abuse and family violence and sexual assault and being vulnerable and taken advantage of because they don't know they don't have to tolerate that, and they don't know where to go when those things happen, and they don't know they have the right to say yes or no and how to do that safely. And I think that's where the focus needs to be.*"

When discussing program content delivery, the Program Developer highlighted that "*it was invaluable having a Counsellor in the room*", particularly someone who was local, as "*that local person who dealt with the disclosure and the de-escalation in the moment was actually the person that called* [them] *to do the intake, and that made a big difference.*" Similar to discussions had with the Program Developer and the Therapeutic Group Work Counsellor in August 2023, the Program Developer in 2024 outlined that there was still a significant number of disclosures from participants occurring during program delivery:

> "*I've noticed is in this last two or three months leading up to the final evaluation, I've had a Counsellor in the room nearly every session. Which has been amazing. And they've been great counselling choices, they have been incredible, and it's made a massive difference, especially for disclosures. I think though, it's made me reflect on how much easier and perhaps productive this program could have been over the last two or three years had that been the case the whole way through.*"

It was evident that although some program content may have required amending to ensure it suited the needs and ability of participants, the program never lost sight of always being client-focused. The Program Developer outlined how the content remained focused on empowerment, education, and safety for all those involved.

Suggestions for program facilitation

Now, multiple years into the program, the Program Developer had a number of suggestions regarding facilitation that could be considered if the program were to continue. As the Program Developer was outgoing, they described who they believed needed to come into their role and the Counsellor role in future:

> "*I think if you have a Coordinator or Facilitators who are disability and trauma informed, and you have a cohesive peer educated team who are trauma informed, and have done some work around insight and awareness and self-regulation, and you then have a skilled Counsellor Advocate who understands all of those complexities but also has a relationship with the Peer Educators, then that would work.*"

A consideration for training was that Facilitators, program partners and Peer Educators engage in different training that has a "*slightly different foci*" to ensure it is relevant and informative for all staff, "*Facilitator training, for say Councillor Advocates, should be a full day or a day and a half. Peer educator training needs to be 2 days and the two have to be separated.*" Including a Counsellor in the program delivery was highlighted in the August 2023 interviews as extremely important for program participants, and for the support of program staff. The Program Developer reiterated this importance, stating how the person in this role "*has to be interested in the program, understand the complexities of the space, and have a relationship and being involved with those Peer Educators outside of the room*":

> "*It needs to be the same Counsellor every time. It needs to be a Counsellor who is disability aware and informed and more than 50% of our clients that come through the door at CASA* [Centre Against Sexual Assault] *have some form of disability.*"

The Program Developer gained great insight into how the SL&RR program could continue in the future and what considerations should be made if it were re-developed. They discussed the importance of particular staff in the program, demonstrating how including a Program Coordinator, Developer, Facilitator, and Peer Educators could benefit one another and program participants in the future.

Examining the current program resources

A key focus of discussion in the 2024 interview with the Program Developer was the content and resources included in the current SL&RR program. As previously discussed in the August 2023 interviews, the Program Developer reiterated there were some outdated content included in the program resources that required updating. The development of program resources would be a significant recommendation arising from this project.

When discussing the physical program resources such as the manual and the educational videos, the program facilitator highlighted how the manual needed to be "*visual*" and that it needed to be "*a bit more user friendly and a bit more useful.*" They discussed the inclusion of links to the course videos "*so people can go back and watch them themselves… And have more appropriate content and language in those videos stories.*" Consideration into how adults learn and ways to "*accommodate all those different learning styles and capacities*" was also discussed, demonstrating how not one manual, video or course delivery style would suit all participants, with the need to be flexible in delivery and content available:

> "*I really like the idea of having a book that participants can hold and have and write in and take away with them. I don't think we need a Facilitator manual, a participant manual, a learning partner manual. It's too overwhelming for participants and it's the participants that we serve*".

Similar to the August 2023 interviews with both the Program Developer and the Therapeutic Group Work Counsellor, the Program Developer in 2024 reiterated the need to update the program resources if SL&RR were to continue. Updating the resources to be user-friendly, appropriate to participants' needs and capacity, and revised with more inclusive language was vital to ensure it was relevant, safe, and informative.

Reflections on growth of the Peer Educators and self

The Program Developer reflected on the profound positive changes they saw in the Peer Educators, highlighting how the program had improved *"confidence and knowing that they could be their authentic self in a safe space"* and how this gave them *"the confidence to tackle the world as themselves."* This was not only in a personal sense, but also professionally, *"there's a lot of roles that* [they] *didn't think* [they] *would be able to do or have access to that* [they] *do. I think we've given* [them] *that confidence"*:

> *"I definitely would be confident in saying those conversations and the work in this space and the exposure to say your* [CERC] *team and other organisations and information led to them having a safe platform to test the waters of their true self in a safe space."*

The Program Developer recounted the benefits they saw in each Peer Educator, for some it was *"being exposed to these groups,* [they] *learned more than* [they] *taught.* [They] *learned self-acceptance."* For others, it meant they had gained skills in *"confidently stating* [their] *boundaries on things and asking for help"* and *"challenging the world when it's not fair and calling things out"*:

> *"*[They] *learnt to understand* [themselves] *and what* [their] *world now looks like.* [They] *learned to let go of some of those expectations and things that held* [them] *back…* [They] *learned to ask for help."*

Recounting some of the difficulties the Peer Educators were facing in their own personal lives whilst still delivering the SL&RR program, the Program Developer discussed strategies in place to support Peers mid-session, *"we have little code where* [they'll] *let me know I need to take over or* [they'll] *start to deliver and then I'll know* [they've] *lost what* [they] *need to do."* It was important to note that *"they've* [the Peer Educators] *all got such very distinct capabilities and thrive in those areas, like anyone."*

When reflecting on learnings and achievements during the SL&RR program, the Program Developer was asked about their own personal learnings during this time, *"I think I've just learned a lot of things about myself and the world that are really valuable that probably have made a significant difference to how I view other people in the world, it's been big"*:

> *"I've probably learnt a lot more about my own internal biases and assumptions and misinformation about disability and working in that space and the complexities of it."*

The Program Developer was honest in their own capacities, strengths, and weaknesses, highlighting how they had *"learned a lot about myself as a leader and how I manage people and how I approach issues with people. I've probably developed a huge level of empathy and curiosity and compassion."* They reflected on how these learnings were developed through the support of their Peer Educators and how these relationships encouraged their own personal and professional growth:

> *"I've probably also learnt about me that I've always known I'm stubborn, but I've realised that I can now, instead of getting angry and stomping my feet at the indignity, that I can actually channel that to create something valuable for other people, and that despite the challenges and barriers and all those other things happening in the background, that when I have clear focus and a good team that we're like a steamroller and I couldn't have done it without the team."*

Upon reflection, the Program Developer highlighted how *"what I've realised is that this program has heaps of potential and could grow and could be bigger."* They were motivated by the learnings and achievements seen in their Peer Educator colleagues, whilst also being motivated by seeing program participants supported through their own journeys in the SL&RR program. Despite moving on from the role, the Program Developer was motivated to stay up to date with program developments and was invested in the success of the program in future.

7.2 THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF PEER EDUCATORS – 2023

The CERC evaluation team collected qualitative data (individual interviews and focus groups) from the Peer Educators in two stages: 2023 and 2024. Four individual interviews were conducted in June, September, and October 2023; one was conducted in June 2024. In addition, the CERC evaluation team conducted one focus group with three Peer Educators in April 2024. The qualitative data collected in 2023 and 2024 were analysed separately using thematic analysis to reflect changes between these two periods. Four major themes were generated from interview sessions, including Organisational collaboration, Support needed for the program team, Program content and suggestions for improvement, and the Value of being a Peer Educator.

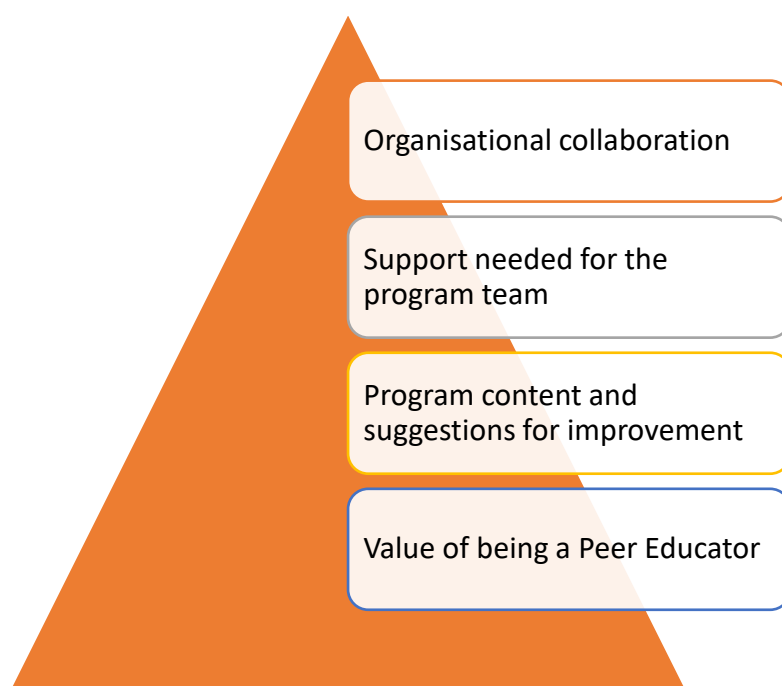The key themes of the 2023 qualitative data are presented in Figure 33 below.

Figure 33: Qualitative data of Peer Educators in 2023 – Thematic Analysis

Theme 1 - Organisational collaboration

The SRL&RR program was a collaborative project between the New Wave Gippsland and the GCASA. Many of the Peer Educators who co-facilitated the SL&RR program with GCASA's staff came from New Wave Gippsland. The Peer Educators reflected on how GCASA's operational structure supported the program, and that New Wave Gippsland were able to learn from being involved in the program.

> *"Unfortunately, over the time I've been with the New Wave Gippsland, I've noticed that a lot of the members have fallen away".*

Despite the differences between the organisations there was a shared understanding and desire to see the program succeed in Gippsland.

Theme 2 – Support needed for the program team

Interview participants outlined that the ideal SL&RR program team for running each session comprised two GCASA staff members and one or two Peer Educators. One GCASA staff member facilitated each program session supported by Peer Educators. Another staff member played a supportive role in dealing with situations where people with intellectual disabilities were triggered by the program content and/or provided specific support to participants with a relatively severe level of intellectual disabilities. This ideal team composition did not always happen, creating some challenges in facilitating the program session. This issue was a recurring theme suggested by different Peer Educators during the interviews.

GCASA had two staff members run each education session supported by Peer Educators for a period, but due to the resignation of a Counsellor who had provided a supportive role during each session, GCASA had only one staff member run each education session. During this time, the Peer Educators observed that a supportive staff member was needed during each session, and consideration needed to be made for having both male and female staff members, *"It's good to have another male presence in the room."* Although having two GCASA staff members with the capacity to swap each other's roles when necessary it might not have always been possible, having a designated support staff member was essential:

> *"We need something like a supporting staff so that* [the facilitator] *doesn't have to take on too much responsibility.* [they are] *trying to swap the jobs around for everyone so they can do different things, and it's not easy for* [them] *to do everything."*

GCASA provided in-kind support for the project by releasing staff who understood the support needs of the participants, for the training. Administrative support was available for the period 2021 onwards.

Peer Educators highlighted how taking on too much responsibility could result in the Program Facilitator being stressed, and at the limit of their ability to do more, as reflected in the quote below:

> *"*[the Facilitator's] *the main reason people come to the program. We can get the information out there, but* [they're] *the one who sells it, and I think the more we can do to support* [them]*, the more* [they] *can go out, and* [they'll] *do that more freely without being under stress."*

As important as having two GCASA staff members running an education session was, having more than one Peer Educator co-facilitating each session was also highlighted as essential. For instance, when asked about how many Peer Educators there should be for each education session, one Peer Educator suggested two Peer Educators with rationale:

> *"I think two is a good number because one only gives one view. Everyone's different. And even if it's a similar experience, it's going to be different for both so that they can relate to the different people in the room."*

Furthermore, one Peer Educator believed that the program team needed administrative support from GCASA in organising events:

> *"I think that while it's very important to have one person that does all of the key events and really important like core aspects of the program go through…. I think it would also be beneficial for everyone else to be included at least a little bit in those sorts of things."*

The analysis evidenced by different quotes in this theme suggested that the SL&RR program team needed the necessary support to run the education session smoothly and provide maximum benefits to all involved: the program staff, Peer Educators, and participants with different intellectual disabilities.

Theme 3 – Program content and suggestions for improvement

During interview sessions, the CERC evaluation team asked the Peer Educators to describe the focus of the program in their own words. Although the program sessions focused on educational information in relation to safe sex lives and healthy relationships, there was an identified advocacy element in empowering people with intellectual disabilities to have their own voice and speak up against domestic violence:

> *"It is a program that is for and about disabled people* [people with a disability] *primarily that it focuses on education and advocacy. We deliver to the disabled community, where we help educate them on things like safe sex, safe relationships, domestic violence and just a whole bunch of things that they may have missed out on due to several life reasons."*

A recurring theme generated from the interviews with Peer Educators was the program challenge of reaching out to people with disabilities, with their parents or carers identified as the gatekeepers. The *"fear of the unknown"* among the parents or carers was identified as one of the primary reasons prohibiting the program to reach out to the participants:

> *"I think every parent or carer has that fear of the unknown… So, if, say, the person that's going through the program comes up to them and starts talking about this, or if that the parent or the carer know how to react or even what sort of support for them to be able to speak to their daughter, son, client or whatever, I think that would help expand the program."*

Some suggestions were made by the Peer Educators to improve the capacity for the program to reach out to people with disabilities. One suggestion was to have a program for the parents or carers:

> *"I think it's important to try and get to the parents or carers, possibly on separate time. I was part of the project a couple of years ago. I guess it was directed at people with disabilities, but a lot of the people that turned up were the carers."*

Another suggestion to reduce the fear of the unknown held by the parents or providers was to change the name of the program. The Peer Educators believed that this name change was required to better reflect the broad content included in the program:

> *"I think we need to change our name as well so that people realise it's not sex education or about sexual assaults, and we've just got to figure out how to work it around people, so they realise that's for that reason."*

Some Peer Educators raised the issue of gender diverse inclusivity in the program, "*inclusivity in terms of language and LGBTQIA+ people within it."* The Peers did, however, understand that this concern was shared by their GCASA staff colleagues, with all program team members in agreeance with this proposed update to the content. Some Peer Educators also contemplated designing the program to cater to young people under 18.

> *"The other thing that I have thought about but understand may not be entirely realistic because we cater to people over 18 mainly is I think it would be really beneficial to have a program specifically either for minors or their parents or both."*

Some participants also suggested developing information, education, and communication (IEC) materials for the broader community to display at restaurants and cafes to widen the reach of the program to groups they may have otherwise missed:

> *"If we could somehow figure out a way to reach out to restaurants, even cafes and let them know that we can set up their menus or give them hard copies of menus that have Braille over the top or anything along those lines. I think it would be really helpful. Because I'm sure, there's a lot of people who struggle with seeing that go out to a restaurant and just have to rely on someone else."*

The Peer Educators highlighted several considerations that they believed could improve the program content, delivery, and reach, ensuring it was available to all those who needed it. The Peer Educators were also motivated to include parents and carers in receiving SL&RR information to reduce the barriers for the communities they served.

Theme 4 – Value of being a Peer Educator

During interview sessions, when asked how they found the Peer Educator role, all participants showed enjoyment and happiness with the role. They described how they found teaching and interacting with people with intellectual disabilities fun:

> *"It's really fun. People like to listen. I enjoy teaching it. I really enjoy teaching that because I think I'm getting something out of it, and I hope that they have learnt from it."*

While some Peer Educators had more experience than others, a less-experienced Peer Educator felt supported and enjoyed the role, *"this has been my first role that I've felt 100% supported in and able to do everything I've been asked and have just really enjoyed it."* The Peer Educators' subjective feeling of contribution to the community of people with intellectual disabilities through the role motivated them to want to continue the work in the future:

> *"It was only that moment that made me open my eyes. And yeah, I'm not gonna stop because I'm happy to help anyone and support anyone through what they're going through."*

The Peer Educators were also asked what they had learnt about themselves. Self-reflection was highlighted in discussion as one of the benefits of being a Peer Educator. The participants demonstrated that this self-reflection was essential for dealing with difficult situations in their lives:

> *"I learnt to take some time to reflect on stuff. If I need to reflect on something, I will reflect on it. So that's what I take out of that. I also realise if I think it's time to stop, stop, walk out the room and breathe."*

Interacting with the program participants and teaching them about sexual lives and healthy relationships significantly increased the Peer Educators' confidence in expressing themselves, which was part of their advocacy skills:

"I've learned to stand up a little bit more for myself, my boundaries. I am becoming more confident in expressing what I do know. And even why I know it. Let's just say I feel like I've gone from kindergarten to year ten straight away."

By seeing the numerous benefits of being a Peer Educator in the SL&RR program, the participant encouraged other people with lived experience to take up the role. Their motivating comments for a new Peer Educator were around *"be yourself"*, *"don't be afraid, just speak up"*, and they would be *"surrounded by some amazing people"* in the program. The Peers described that *"this is an environment where your thoughts and ideas are appreciated".*

It was evident throughout interviews with Peer Educators the benefit they had received from being part of the SL&RR program. The discussion in this theme indicated the essential value of being a Peer Educator of the program, and the Peer Educators encouraged people with lived experiences to take up this Peer Educator role.

The key themes in this subsection are derived from an individual interview with one Peer Educator in June 2024 and one focus group with three Peer Educators in April 2024. Four major themes were generated, including the Role of New Wave Gippsland, Having a voice, being heard, Having the right people in the right roles, and Right pitch for program. The key themes of the 2024 qualitative data are presented in Figure 34 below.
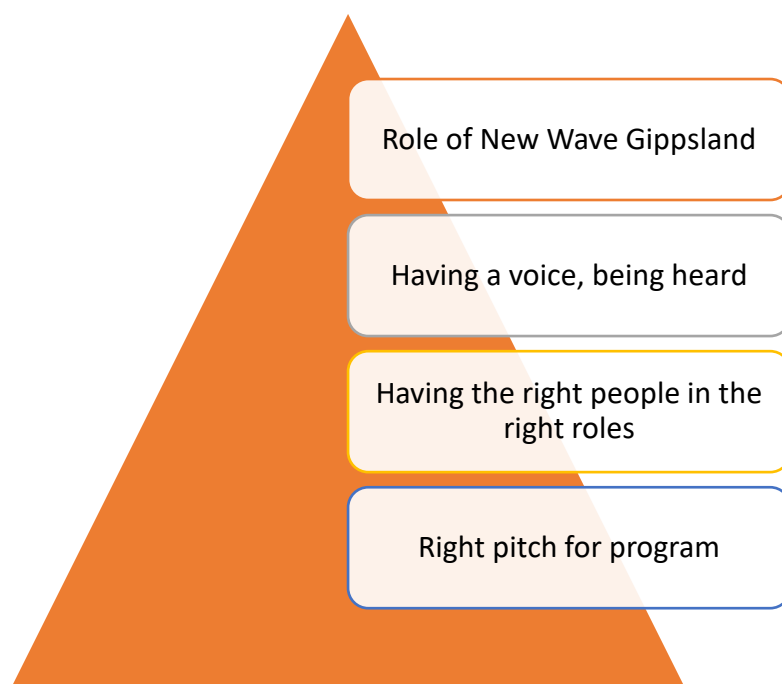

Figure 34: Qualitative data of Peer Educators in 2024 – Thematic Analysis

Theme 1 – Role of New Wave Gippsland

Similar to the findings derived from the data collected in 2023, some participants observed that the relatively flattened structure of New Wave Gippsland was not conducive to how the SL&RR program was run. There was no top-down management leading and/or setting priorities for New Wave Gippsland, meaning that the members were relatively equal and directed priorities with support from project workers. The following quote reflects the different organisational structures between GCASA and New Wave Gippsland:

> *"Because GCASA is a professional organisation. It's a very top-down kind of management structure, whereas New Wave is more of an equalising kind of organisation, like everyone's equal, and there was not much management saying you should do this, you should do that. It's up to the project workers and the participants."*

One participant acknowledged that *"GCASA did the best they could. But New Wave didn't really see it as a priority just because of the key people within New Wave."* New Wave Gippsland permitted some of its members to be Peer Educators of the SL&RR program run by GCASA to meet the program's funding criteria. However, New Wave Gippsland, as a group, distanced themselves from the program. The following quote reflects this issue:

> *"We're all kind of part of it as well as part of New Wave. We were kind of seen as the people doing the project with New Wave, and the rest of New Wave didn't really need to bother with it. Whereas maybe if we had taken a bit of a step back from New Wave, that might have changed it a little bit for having the key people, like we all had to come from New Wave to meet the funding criteria."*

Some Peer Educators who had been members of New Wave Gippsland distanced themselves from the group after taking up a Peer Educator role with the SL&RR program. One participant from a focus group was an example, and they also observed that some of the old members did the same. Their accounts presented in the quote below suggested some disagreement or tension occurred within New Wave Gippsland:

> *"And I've known them* [New Wave Gippsland members] *for a long time now.* [They] *would just sit back and be bombarded and probably will not come back. Because they'll be so confused and lost and in not being able to have a voice."*

This theme suggests that New Wave Gippsland was less engaged in the SL&RR program. Some tension among members of New Wave Gippsland occurred, leading some to distance themselves from the group.

Theme 2 – Having a voice and being heard

The Peer Educators saw that having a voice and being heard was essential for themselves and the program participants with intellectual disabilities. They achieved this by participating in delivering program sessions, which created an empowering environment for the participants to have their voices heard. During interview sessions, a Peer Educator recounted their newfound ability to speak up, a skill acquired through program participation that transferred outside of their employment to their personal life:

> *"I am definitely more of a dog with a bone now when it comes to people's rights, human decency, and even systemic issues; I think that someone needs to speak up. And I do."*

The Peer Educators observed empowering effects among their Peers resulting from the program. For instance, during a focus group, one participant explained that they gained more confidence in dealing with carers, and to advocate for people with disabilities. Another Peer Educator confirmed this as indicated in the following quote:

> *"*[They're] *not afraid to have a voice. And when* [they] *feel squashed,* [they'll] *step back, and then think about it. And then* [they'll] *come forward. And I'm proud of* [them]*."*

The Peer Educators were diverse in terms of gender, gender identity, age, and forms of intellectual disabilities experienced. A young Peer Educator reflected on their time with the program and realised how valuable they were to the SL&RR program as they brought their lived experience as a queer person to the team:

> *"I bring the lived experience of a queer person who is also disabled. I find that to be very valuable. And I have grown in this team in such a way that I have learned how valuable that is."*

The empowering effect of the program was not only for the Peer Educators but also for the program participants with people intellectual disabilities. One Peer Educator explained that this empowering effect for the program participants extended beyond the education session setting to the real world in the disability service support sector:

> "The program can benefit the people even more where they're more confident then to not just have a voice in this room, but to walk out the door and still have that voice go to organisations like Orange Door and be heard."

The Peer Educators highlighted how empowering the program participants to be more confident and feel safe when dealing with real-life situations was a triumph of the SL&RR program, *"what we are trying to enforce with the participants is that they can go to these people and feel safe."* The empowering effect on the program participants started with having a voice and feeling heard in a safe space education session provided by the SL&RR program. One Peer Educator believed that some participants wanted to do the program again due to this safe space.

> "I think because it is within the actual room, they realise that it's such an open and honest conversation that they don't get anywhere else within society."

Seeing all the benefits of the SL&RR program, the Peer Educators hoped that it should be expanded to reach more people with intellectual disabilities. They recognised the importance of evaluating the program, understanding its successes and challenges in order to build a stronger and more impactful program in future:

> "I just hope that we can expand the program in a way that will help. You need the participants to be able to lead better lives, and it's really hard to know how to do without data."

The Peer Educators demonstrated the increase in their voices and the voices of the program participants to be heard. They recounted that the skills they had learnt as Peer Educators was transferring to their daily lives, helping them to feel empowered and respected.

Theme 3 – Having the right people in the right roles

The Peer Educators' experience co-facilitating education sessions with the Program Facilitator enabled them to reflect on the importance of having the right people on the facilitating team to give a safe space and support to the participants with intellectual disabilities.

The Peer Educators valued having a Counsellor involved in facilitating the SL&RR program sessions, highlighting that this role supported them, their colleagues, and the participants. The absence of a Counsellor without a replacement was recounted as a difficult moment for the program. As reflected in this quote, one of the Peer Educators felt that the Program Facilitator was overloaded with the commitments of their role:

> "Taking it back to basics. If going forward and everything goes well, there definitely needs to be someone else in the room constantly to be there with the Facilitator. I think the Facilitator is overworked, and it's not fair. I know what that feels like."

Seeing this difficulty, the Peer Educators suggested a "*constant regular person*" was required for the Facilitator and Peer Educators to facilitate the education sessions to the highest standard. The Peer

Educators believed that having a Counsellor on the facilitating team was key to providing a safe space for the participants so that the program could make a difference in people's lives:

> *"They* [the SL&RR participants] *need the support, and we're here able to give it to them. I think part of it being able to offer that safe space for people to continue making that difference is to make sure that we've got things like a Counsellor."*

Having the right Peer Educators on the facilitating team was also highlighted as important. When asked about their advice for recruiting new Peer Educators, one participant suggested Peer Educators need to be comfortable with, and confident in delivering the content in an educational way:

> *"We have to be really thoughtful about the content and to be able to talk about the content in an educational kind of way, not in a "I'm hearing this for the first time, and I really need to process" this kind of way. Yeah, they have to really be at that level of being out there. They are a Peer Educator rather than a participant."*

This theme emphasised the importance of having the right people on the facilitating team to provide a safe space and support to participants with intellectual disabilities. The Peer Educators demonstrated that this safe space required one Counsellor, one Facilitator, and Peer Educators on the team.

Theme 4 – Right pitch for the program

The right pitch for the program was essential to make a better difference in the lives of participants with intellectual disabilities. This included the content, appropriate language, and educational materials. One Peer Educator noted the importance of the content that responded to participants' needs, ultimately making a difference in their lives. When asked about the best thing about the program, one Peer Educator loved *"the nitty-gritty"* of the content that was beneficial to the participants. They continued to give an example of one participant who was initially confused about *"whether* [they] *were allowed to masturbate"*. The accounts of the Peer Educator were as follows:

> *"I liked the nitty gritty of the actual course content when people get something out of it. We had one participant.* [They] *were really confused about what* [they] *were allowed to do or not."*

One Peer Educator explained that a participant came to do the program a second time because that participant "*got so much out of*" the program. The Peer Educator recounted sharing with the participant, "y*ou keep coming back as many times as you like."*

As essential as the program content was, the Peer Educators discussed how the delivery of content must use appropriate language for the diverse participants with intellectual disabilities. During focus group discussions, Peer Educators heatedly discussed the appropriate language. While one Peer Educator suggested appropriate language for both queer participants with intellectual disabilities and binary participants with intellectual disabilities, another Peer Educator felt uncomfortable with that suggestion. As reflected in the quote below, they were worried about the confusion that tailoring the language for both groups of participants may create confusion:

> "*Being politically correct is only going to confuse them more. This is about educating them about their rights, how to advocate for themselves, how to get and to be heard."*

The discussion between Peer Educators continued, with dialogue moving towards wanting to focus on the content rather than appropriate language, *"political correctness is getting in the way of the message of the group. When I mentioned that I want the language to be transformed a little bit, I simply say to reflect the community we're serving."* As reflected in the quote below, "*more neutral language*" may encourage queer participants to feel more included in discussions:

> *"I'm just trying to introduce some more neutral language so that if we get some queer participants, they don't feel alienated."*

In addition to the program content and appropriate language, educational materials, specifically videos, were highlighted as main contributors to the right pitch for the program. The Peer Educators believed that videos were important for the program, with some suggesting cutting them shorter into *"bite-sized chunks"*. When asked what the ideal length of each video was, one participant responded:

> *"Maybe like four or five minutes? They haven't changed much since they first created the videos in terms of teaching it to the participants. I think we need to really think and get the teaching of the different elements, actually like breaking it down into bite-sized chunks rather than one big, long video to talk about that video just by itself."*

The Peer Educators had numerous examples of how the SL&RR program could be adapted and improved in future to better serve participants. Ensuring that inclusive language was addressed, educational and supportive content was included, and content that was accessible to their participants with intellectual disability was prioritised was highlighted as essential for program success.

7.4 PEER EDUCATOR CASE STUDY AND REFLECTIONS

The following case study describes the experience of one Peer Educator involved in the SL&RR program. This case study was provided by the SL&RR team. Despite having permission from the Peer Educator to share their story, names and identifying details have been changed to increase privacy.

Case study 2: Peer Educator – Learning about oneself and services through delivering education sessions and interacting with the participants.

Brian, in his 50s, had a stroke leading to an acquired brain injury (ABI) in 2019. Before this event, he worked for a large organisation in Melbourne, working directly with the public. He had an active life, adult children, and previous experience in social work working with perpetrators of violence and running groups for men educating on violence, regulation, and more. Brian also had a very active social life and regularly drove to visit family who lived on property in a rural area with no public transport.
 	
 After his stroke, Brian was discharged from the hospital with a referral to his GP, but no information about disability support / NDIS / community support. He was left to his own devices. He said he had a new brain insult, was trying to process the injury and what it meant, and was sent home with nothing and told, *"You'll be right, mate"*. Two years on he is still fighting for services like physiotherapy.
 	
 At the time, Brian didn't know other people with disabilities. His first experience of assistance was going to group hand therapy and sitting around a table with six other people experiencing their own issues. Whilst doing exercises they talked amongst themselves – that was his support. They learnt things from each other. Brian says his fingernails were so long that he had trouble picking up things. One other lady in the group asked why he didn't just go and get the ladies at the nail salon to do his nails. The individual support that he got from the group - practical support that was actually helpful:
 	
     "I didn't know people cut nails for you! I had never needed services like that before and didn't even know they existed. So, I paid a lady to cut my nails and still do today. Something so simple makes a big difference in my life. All the stuff that came from that in-house hand therapy at the rehabilitation hospital/stroke ward helped".
 	
 Brian then met a member of New Wave Gippsland at a men's support group. They offered to take him to New Wave. Because of that first experience getting help from other people – not physios or professionals – the people that have already got the services have the knowledge, he went along. He prefers people with lived experience and their advice, not the providers, as they have a lot of political issues. Hearing from people with disabilities is more valuable. Brian said he went to New Wave and was introduced to the SL&RR program:
 	
     "I completed the SL&RR program initially as a facilitator because of my history with program delivery pre-brain injury. They asked me if I'd be interested in the training".
 	
 Brian has learnt a lot about his disability from delivering the group program sessions and from the people who participated in them:
 	
     "I was experiencing some cognitive abnormalities, and one SL&RR participant had severe aphasia – from delivering the group and speaking to her, I self-diagnosed myself with aphasia and then spoke to my GP about it, who said, 'Oh, didn't you know about that?".

Without New Wave and the SL&RR program, Brian said he wouldn't know what services are available in the community. He hated being handed *"that stuff"* (pamphlets, information sheets). In his own accounts:

> *If you have 100 pamphlets, you don't look at any of them. If you hear about it in a group and hear about someone else's experience, I will likely say that I might be interested in that. Or, I might not be interested in that, and it's not of interest to me. Having 100 pamphlets in front of me – I'm not interested in reading any of them. It's like getting junk mail in the letterbox. I don't even read it. My recycle bin is near my front door, and what comes in the letterbox goes straight into the recycling. I don't complain about it because, realistically, someone with a disability is likely to be paid to deliver it. People with disabilities often do what they can to supplement their income. If it comes to it, I'll take the pamphlet to support them. I don't put a "no junk mail" on my letterbox. This isn't something I would have thought of before having a disability.*

Being involved in SL&RR / GCASA / New Wave helped Brian improve his confidence; it's helped him realise he could still do most of the things he used to do regardless of his disability.

When Brian initially did his welfare training, he had no intention of working in disability. It wasn't an area that interested him. He had almost no contact with the disability community, and it wasn't even in his sight. It wasn't part of his world. The SL&RR program and New Wave have been the only constant services he's delivered since acquiring his disability:

> *I like doing things like the GCASA stall at events to just be out there in the community, not in a disability forum. We're operating in a disability silo. The SL&RR program delivers to people with disabilities – it's an education program to expose people with disabilities to things they may not have been exposed to before, or they want to expand their knowledge in terms of a topic. The delivery of the program is one thing, but being involved in delivery and just doing what you want to do, not in a silo, is important. I liked attending the service providers expo in Moe. It's clear what the day was about. Service providers explained what they did. That's what it was. It's not spouted as anything else. The SL&RR program and New Wave is about members and it's meeting some needs. I come because I like the people. The pay is almost irrelevant… But if I were doing it only for financial reasons I wouldn't keep doing it because it's not worth it".*

The Program Developer provided the CERC evaluation team with information collected from the Peer Educators about their 2024 reflections of being involved in the SL&RR program. This information was reviewed and collated into an infographic pictured below. Peer Educator reflections centred around their personal and professional growth since being involved in the program. They discussed their strengths, and the benefit the program was giving to people with an intellectual disability.

Peer Educator Reflections - 2024

One of the most positive aspects of SL&RR in the last three years was ensuring that the program remained grounded within academic research rigours. This means that when advocacy for more funding occurs, the evidence base can speak for itself.

My proactive approach to advocacy is established by my deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ and Disabled Community, coupled with a firm belief in the power of education and awareness to drive positive change.

Moving forward it would be great to see a program like SL&RR evolve to suit a wider, more diverse community, for the education to reach the carers, the family and any professionals that could have an impact in the lives of the participants.

The strengths I bring are my loyalty, honesty, understanding, trust, laughter, having fun & being respectful and so much more. I help to reach out for people with all different disabilities who will need the help when needed. My interest related to work is the work itself. I love the program and what I do.

Through my collaboration with fellow Peer Educators, I have grown as a person both professionally and personally... I have had my beliefs challenged and changed and had my previously black and white thinking expanded for the better.
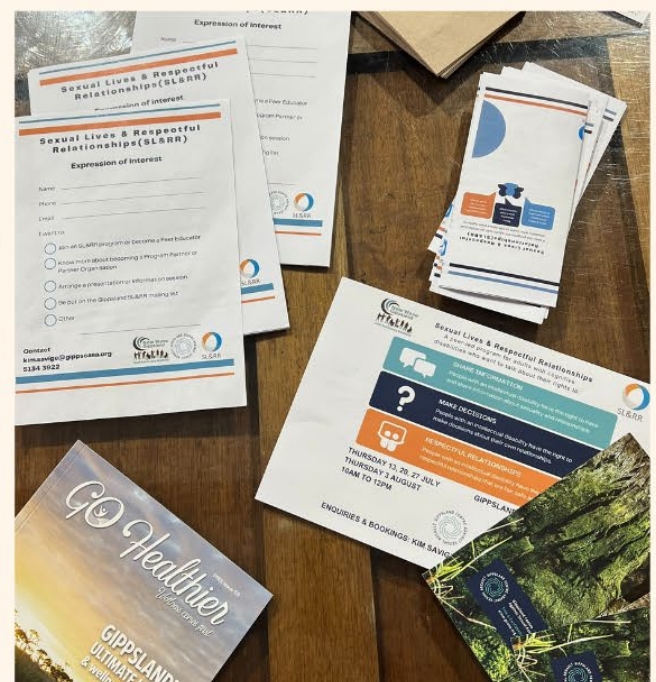
7.5 THEMATIC ANALYSIS WITH PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

The CERC evaluation team conducted four focus group discussions, one in August 2023 and three in April and May 2024. One of these four focus group discussions was online, two focus group discussions were conducted in Warragul, and one in Morwell. In total, there were 21 program participants included in these focus group discussions. The focus group discussions lasted approximately 20 - 25 minutes in duration and focused on participants' perspectives and experiences in doing an SL&RR program. A thematic analysis method was used to analyse these focus group discussion data, generating eight major themes, as shown in Figure 35 below.

Figure 35: Qualitative data of program participants – Thematic Analysis

Theme 1 – Motivation to attend

A critical analysis of the focus group discussion data of the SL&RR program participants revealed that the interaction of intrinsic/internal and extrinsic/external factors motivated people with intellectual disabilities to participate in this program. External factors included suggestions from service providers and/or counsellors:

> *"I heard* [this SL&RR program] *from a counsellor when I was going through therapy for being raped, and they just told me about it."*

These external factors interacted with the internal/intrinsic interest of people with intellectual disabilities, motivating them to participate in the program designed specifically to support and empower People with Intellectual Disability. The purpose of the program was of interest to people with intellectual disabilities:

> *"I've been to a few programs, but mainly the ones where we present to service providers and things along those lines. This has been my first time to an actual program that targets just disabled people."*

Key interests expressed by the participants during focus group discussions which encouraged them to do this program included an intention to learn new things linked to sexual lives and healthy relationships before having a partner. One participant explained that they wanted to attend the program more than once *"because I like to learn new things."* Another participant indicated their intention to have a partner as their reason for coming to this program, *"I'm single and live with my parents, but I would like to have a girlfriend one day.*"

Another reason emphasised by one participant showed that participating in an SL&RR program and learning about sexual rights was to prove to others that they could do things on their own, *I wanted to do it myself. I wanted to do it myself to prove to them* [family and friends] *that I could do things on my own."*

The discussion with examples from the participants in this theme illustrates the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that encouraged people with intellectual disabilities to participate in the SL&RR program.

Theme 2 – Family support

Family support was important for people with intellectual disabilities wanting to attend the SL&RR program. During focus group discussions, when asked whether their family was happy for them to come to the program, one participant responded, *"They're all proud of me".* Another participant echoed this kind of support: "*I have people support and great family support for stuff".* Similarly, one participant indicated that their parents were happy for them to join the program and provided them with support:

> *"My parent, my mum, was pretty happy with it* [the program] *…. That's the way of getting me some help that I needed. So, she helped with that."*

Some participants stated that their whole family, including siblings, said it was good for them to attend the program. One participant recounted how they were doing the program for the second time, and when asked whether the family encouraged them to participate in the program, they responded:

> *"Well, I did this beforehand, and if it were just for my sisters and brothers, they would say yes, especially my mum; they're great. It's just nice to have support."*

Participants discussed similar support to attend the SL&RR program from housemates. One participant indicated that their housemates provided them with support for participating in the program, *"I'm at a share house… I've put myself that I'm going to do this* [program], *and the people at the house will support me with it."*

Family support also encouraged some participants to share what they had learned from the program with their family, whilst also maintaining their own privacy. When asked whether the participants had shared what they had learned with families and friends, one participant said:

> *"I partly showed my mum. But I haven't told her what the details we have learned here. I guess she, Mum, wanted to know what the rights and wrongs are. What did the program look like? I really have a short memory and just said* [that]*."*

Stories from participants outlined the crucial role of family support, including housemates, in providing a sense of security for people with intellectual disabilities to attend and stay in the SL&RR

program. Family support encouraged the participants to share what they had learned with the family and instilled a feeling of safety and comfort.

Theme 3 – Learning from the Peer Educators

The presence of the Peer Educators in the education sessions was valuable for the participants in several ways, including making them feel good, allowing them to learn about their childhood stories, bringing them together, and allowing them to feel safe sharing their stories.

The participants' good feelings stemmed from seeing the Peer Educators as people with similar life experiences. With their lived experience, the Peer Educators understood the participants' feelings, *"not everyone's situation is the same, but at least it feels good that someone else is like us."* The presence of the Peer Educators enabled the participants to learn different things about their childhood stories:

> *"Maybe the stories from he or she, we learnt different things. We learnt something about that person's childhood."*

The participants found the Peer Educators' open-mindedness valuable in helping them feel comfortable during the sessions, *"they're very open-minded. Trying to help. And they make us feel comfortable."* The shared identity of having an intellectual disability between the Peer Educators and participants brought them together so they could relate to one another in the discussions during the sessions:

> *"They* [the Peer Educators] *have a disability, we have a disability, so it's them teaching us. And that has brought us closer with this approach."*

The SL&RR program participants highlighted that the safe space provided by the Peer Educators and session facilitators was important for them to feel safe sharing their stories with others, "*they keep it in this room, and it stays in the room*". Sharing stories and emotions in this safe space made the participants feel that their problems were solved. When asked whether they were nervous about learning or sharing their stories during the sessions, one participant responded:

> *"Not really nervous, but it's good. It was not really as big that I spoke up about my future, about having in my last relationship and the staff were supportive. And just like that, they were really good with it. And then what I said, it's stay in this room. It won't go further. So, I said thanks. So, that's really good; get it off me to get it all fixed up."*

The program participants valued the presence of the Peer Educators as the session facilitators and the safe space they provided to share their stories and emotions. Having program facilitators that they believed shared their experiences ensured the participants felt heard and seen when learning and sharing.

Theme 4 – Learn how to be safe

Learning how to be safe was repeatedly cited as key to the program and expressed by program participants in different ways. Understanding sexual harassment as part of learning how to be safe was well captured in the narratives of participants when asked why they came to this SL&RR program:

> *"We wanted to do it* [the SL&RR program] *because we wanted to do a special and different learning about sexual harassment. And we wanted to learn what we can do to make us feel safe, and the wrong things we can't do* [unsafe ways]. *So, we know the difference between right and wrong."*

The participants outlined how some topics covered in this SL&RR program were sometimes challenging, at times making them feel uncomfortable. Nevertheless, the feelings of uncomfortableness were reduced by their participation in the discussions encouraged by the program:

> *"I think some of the topics have been tough, but that's important because it promotes discussion and further thoughts on why we're uncomfortable and why we need to be learning these things."*

One participant mentioned, *"It's kind of good that I'm learning all this stuff and learning some new skills and knowledge."*

The participants believed that the program and facilitators *"teach us good things. How to be safe in life".* Participants enjoyed the increased learning they were experiencing, *"It's kind of good that I'm learning all this stuff and learning some new skills and knowledge".* Some participants gave examples elaborating on learning how to be safe:

> *"Say, you were going to meet up with someone and of course, you make it in a public place around lots of people. If you're going to meet a stranger that you've met online or something or someone you've been talking to for ages and things like that. And they've got the good skills to learn if it's right or not to be meeting up with people like that."*

Some participants discussed how they had applied what they had learned in their real-life, *"I think it was last week that I spoke up about what happened to me."* Furthermore, one participant outlined that what they learned from the program would be useful for them in the future, as they were ready to deal with any potential unwanted behaviour that could occur:

> *"I think to me it's good because in the future it* [unwanted or non-consensual behaviour] *might happen to us. And we're going to be prepared to protect ourselves."*

Part of learning how to be safe in the SR&RR program was learning *"how to respect other opinions."* This education surrounding respectful relationships was linked to learning how to debate and argue with one another safely, with being calm as an element of it:

> *"Learning how to talk, like if end up arguing or having a fight. You know what we have to do to help ourselves and calm down and do what we want to do. And then come back in half an hour and patch things up."*

Participants highly valued the course content and learnings they had achieved as part of the SL&RR program. They outlined that they had not only learnt how to protect themselves from harm, but also to advocate for themselves and respond to a variety of situations safely and effectively.

Theme 5 – Making friends

Making friends/networking was another positive aspect of the SL&RR program raised by the participants. They appreciated the opportunity to discuss things and listen to one another, *"it really helped us and my friends. It seems like we can talk more with friends; we just talk and listen to each*

other, and that's good." This opportunity enabled the participants to learn from one another. As one participant explained, *"We like to learn new things and learn about other people who have disabilities like us and also have those challenges."* They learned from one another through story-sharing in a safe space:

> *"Spending more time sharing all my lovely stories and stuff with everybody, and everybody has their turns of speaking friendly. What says in this room, it doesn't leave. And that's the beauty of it, I reckon."*

This story-sharing helped the participants make friends and/or create networking. When asked to describe what they thought the SL&RR program was about and why they came to do it, one participant responded, *"*[It was] *a program that you can talk about things like how friendship blossoms like that".* This building of friendships was described as building a community, *"it increases community and helps you make friends".* This networking also occurred on social media. When asked whether the participants contacted each other outside the face-to-face space, one participant stated:

> *"Some of us do connect on Facebook sometimes or through the community page because I know a couple of people on there at the moment. And I often talk to someone outside who had not been very well."*

The benefits of making friends through discussions and story sharing in a face-to-face setting and social media encouraged some participants to do the program again, *"I think it's good to do it more than once as well because you will meet people. Usually, I think you would meet new people every time."* The CERC evaluation team found, however, that not all participants communicated with one another outside the program, with space and opportunity for participants to engage in this networking only if they so choose:

> *"I usually just talk to the people I know because I'm in a different environment, trying to take on different issues and stuff."*

Throughout the SL&RR program, participants were able to connect with their peers and make new friends, networking whilst learning about healthy relationships together. These friendships appeared to continue beyond the program, providing another positive outcome for participants engaging in the program.

Theme 6 – Value of program resources

As described in participant interviews, the participants found the videos and workbook very useful, which covered everything they wanted to learn. Nevertheless, some participants felt uncomfortable watching the videos, and some provided suggestions for improvement.

When the participants were asked to comment on the videos and workbook, many liked the stories in the videos and found that the workbook was easy to follow. Both materials were described as important for the SL&RR program. One participant, assisted by a support worker explained how they *"found it very helpful to have the video, and* [they] *(don't) think the workbook is hard."* Other participants highlighted that they believed the program *"covered everything I need to know for me"*, and that it was *"good to have both* [the videos and workbook]*, not just the workbook"*. When describing the importance of the stories provided in the educational videos, one participant described how they felt engaged with this content:

> *"Learning about his or her childhood history. It was really interesting to listen. Some were very funny, and some were a bit sad. But most of them were really good stories of him or her."*

Although participants described that it was challenging at times to discuss sexual lives and respectful relations topics through the program content, some participants found that the program equipped them with valuable lessons for life:

> *"It takes time for us to learn what we have to do and what we must do in the future if that happens. I think it's good that we are going to learn our lessons. Not to do that. So, it will be a valuable lesson we've learnt."*

Alongside this positive feedback on the program materials, some participants expressed their discomfort when watching the educational videos. The sexual abuse stories in the videos triggered anxiety in some participants, causing them to feel too uncomfortable to engage in discussion with their peers about the content:

> *"Well, I was uncomfortable talking about intercourse because of my anxiety. I wouldn't say anything about it. Other people in this room could, but I wasn't comfortable saying it. But I listened to it. But I don't want to say anything about it."*

Participants outlined how the vividness of the stories in the videos resonated with some participants' experiences, whilst others felt the content was "*dark*". These participants described the pain felt when watching the videos, as for some it brought back memories:

> *"The program's content was that people sometimes felt uncomfortable with videos. You're watching a video of those people. You feel really into it, and you feel some of the stuff in that. I've been through it. Watching videos brings back memories."*

Some participants provided feedback on how to improve the SL&RR program. One aspect of this feedback was that some participants wanted more information and/or videos about relationships, sexual lives, and respect:

> *"…I would like to see a bit more information about relationships, sexual lives, and respect. I would like to see more videos and other information. More resources for things and more resources for women as well."*

Further, one participant specifically suggested video subtitles to cater to those with auditory processing issues:

> *"I know some people have auditory processing issues. Hence, an improvement I would suggest is to make sure the videos have subtitles so that people who can't hear very well or have auditory processing issues or anything can read while everyone else just listens."*

This illustrated three aspects of feedback on the program resources: the usefulness of the videos and workbook, the uncomfortable feelings triggered by the videos, and some suggestions for improving the program. Participant experiences gained in interview sessions demonstrated their engagement in the program content and their desire to improve the program in future iterations.

Theme 7 – Telling others about the program

Seeing the benefits of the SL&RR program, some participants outlined how they had told others about the program, including family and friends. Self-determination and/or making one's own choice was one of the recurring themes the participants learned from the program and wanted to share with others:

> *"I think it's good for everyone, anybody who has any kind of disability because not everyone knows everything that we talk about here already. Some people might not be aware that it's not OK for their carers to always make choices for them or for their boyfriends to tell them that they have to do certain things. I think this program opens up dialogue for people to ask if they're unsure about something. That's really important."*

Some other participants shared and/or showed a willingness to share what they learned, *"I'm happy to share what I've done so people can follow my steps".* Other participants shared aspects of the program with their friends and family, however they wanted to keep some elements private for themselves:

> *"I have shared it with my family and my friends, but I just keep it to myself, and if I wanna share, I just let them know how I had a good* [time]*, how I did what and stuff like that. That's what I said once. Yeah. And it's always the truth."*

As participants outlined how they enjoyed the program content, some also described how they wanted to share their involvement of the program with others. Participants demonstrated how they wanted to share the advocacy information they had learnt with their peers, ensuring more people with intellectual disabilities could benefit from this outcome.

Theme 8 – Want to do the program again

When asked whether the participants wanted to do the program again, some participants saw the benefits of doing it again for varied reasons, including doing it again as "*a memory refresher",* particularly when there had been some time between receiving the content:

> *"I'm going to have to come back a couple more times because of my intellectual disability and memory. I forgot stuff quickly because I couldn't concentrate. So, I might have to come back a couple more times."*

Some other participants wanted to learn new things from the program and from each other, "*we might have a few other new things to bring out to the table to share*". Other participants demonstrated the value they gained from both gaining educational resources from the course content, and engaging in discussion with their peers:

> *"Why I would go* [to do the program again] *is just to hear the other different stories, what they've been through, if they've got any other stories on the screen, come back and talk about the different programs, like what's been happening with the person or what happened with it?"*

Although it may not have been an initial considered outcome of the program, participants demonstrated their desire to want to do the program multiple times in order to refresh their memories or learn new things they may have missed during their first program attendance. Participant

experiences outlined the importance of continued content that includes follow up post-program to gain the most benefit.

7.6 SL&RR PARTICIPANT CASE STUDY

The following case study was provided by the SL&RR project team and describes the experience of one SL&RR program participant. Despite having permission from the participant to share their story, names and identifying details have been changed to increase privacy.

Case study 3: Program participant - The importance of doing the program a second time and working with a counsellor while doing the program.
Amy was referred to the SL&RR program by her Counsellor Advocate. Initially, she was hesitant to attend due to her fear of being around males with cognitive disabilities, as her sexual assault had involved a perpetrator within this demographic. Amy was unable to feel safe in the same room as any male and was in the acute phase of her trauma processing.   The Program Developer had some phone calls with Amy in the months leading up to the Latrobe program in her area and was able to do some pre-course work with her about how the group would run, what was involved, and the safety mechanisms involved. Offers were made to meet with the rostered facilitators a week or so before the first session to establish some rapport.   Working with the Counsellor Advocate increased Amy's confidence, and her contact with the Program Developer increased to a point where she felt ok to enrol in the program and see how the first session went. She was reminded of the safety of the space and the options for support before, during and after attendance. Counsellor appointments were scheduled to line up with a day or so after each SL&RR session to allow Amy to discuss the program and any impacts she may have experienced. Amy attended all four sessions of the Latrobe program.   It was a small group, which increased her sense of security. Amy initially displayed some concerning comments and perspectives, and in one session, the Program Developer needed to remove her from the space to go outside and de-escalate. Amy was able to rejoin the group and finish the session. She continued working with the Counsellor Advocate until closure.   Approximately 12 months later, Amy asked to return and complete the program a second time with the benefit of some healing and changes in circumstances. From the very first session it was clear that Amy had had a large amount of personal growth in only 12 months. She contributed thoughtfully and confidently in the space and acknowledged that her first engagement with SL&RR had been difficult for her but valuable because she realised that what she went through was not ok and her feelings were normal. She often commented that she felt glad she had attended initially because it helped her understand the language around her experiences and where to go for support.   When Amy returned to the program a second time, she had a completely different outlook and approach. Her contributions were thoughtful and insightful. She was comfortable being vulnerable in the space and sharing some of her experiences. In her own words, the program

"*taught me about sexual assault and what healthy relationships should look like*". Amy said she knew what to do with the information she learnt and would use it.

The first time around, Amy's feedback was that the program was "*confrontational*" and caused her to be upset. She did, however, concede that towards the end, she could see the point and felt she had gained some value from the program. Working with a counsellor at the same time was beneficial to her as the counsellor understood the program and was able to tailor their sessions to accommodate her. Amy felt that attending gave her some new language and perspectives on her own experiences and helped when she completed her police interview with the Sexual Offences and Child Investigation Team (SOCIT). Her first program assisted her with this process, while the second time around helped her consolidate her learnings.

Image: SL&RR program facilitation

Image: SL&RR program group discussion

A literature review for this project titled: *Peer Educators in the Facilitation of Sexuality and Respectful Relationship Education for People with a Disability: A scoping review and narrative synthesis* has been previously published in a peer-reviewed academic journal. This publication aimed to identify how peer-education models are used in sexuality and respectful relationship education for people with intellectual disability.

For a full copy of the publication, please refer to the journal site using the publication citation:

James, M.H., Porter, J.E., Kattel, S., Prokopiv, V & Hopwood, P. (2022). Peer Educators in the Facilitation of Sexuality and Respectful Relationship Education for People with an Intellectual Disability: A Scoping Review and Narrative Synthesis. *Sexuality and Disability* 40, 487–502. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11195-022-09740-4

ORIGINAL PAPER

Peer Educators in the Facilitation of Sexuality and Respectful Relationship Education for People with an Intellectual Disability: A Scoping Review and Narrative Synthesis

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Abstract

A scoping review was conducted to identify how peer-education models are being used in sexuality and respectful relationship education for people with a disability. The search was conducted in August 2021 using the Joanna Briggs framework to scope and map the literature and research activity. Using strict criteria, 7 online databases, grey literature and reference lists were searched for resources written or published in the last 15 years (2006–2021). Relevant sources were shortlisted and assessed by the two authors. Six sources met the criteria for inclusion in this review. In total, four educational programs are described and discussed. The results identify four sexuality and respectful relationship programs that met screening criteria: (1) "Telling it like it is!", (2) "Sexual Lives and Respectful Relationships", (3) "Talking about sex and relationships: the views of young people with learning disabilities", and (4) "Health, Safety & Sexuality Training for You & Me". Peer-educators experienced increased confidence and feelings of empowerment, while people without an intellectual disability reported a greater understanding of the challenges and experiences of people with a disability. The use of peer educators to deliver sexuality and respectful relationship education for people with intellectual disability is a promising education model with multiple potential benefits for participants. However, more research is needed to understand the consequences and limitations of such programs.

Keywords Intellectual disability · Peer-education · Sexuality and respectful relationships · Education · Australia

9. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report addressed the three evaluation questions set out in Section 3 of this report, drawing on five points of data collected and analysed for this evaluation. These data include:

- Reflection workshop data with the SL&RR program team, including Peer Educators and other relevant GCASA staff members.
- Project data gathered in attendance statistics.
- Survey data from the program and stakeholder participants attending information sessions and/or Café Catch-Up events.
- Interview and focus group data from the SL&RR program staff members and Peer Educators, respectively.
- Interview and focus group data with the SL&RR program participants.

An extension of the New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project was agreed upon and commenced in January 2023. This report answers the evaluation questions based on Phase 2 of the project, in the context of a focus shift agreed upon in the June 2023 reflection workshop. The CERC evaluation team note that the duration of Phase 2 for the project was shorter than that of Phase 1 (18 months versus 2 years).

1. What were the measurable impact, outcomes, and process learnings of the NWG capacity-building program?

The primary focus of the New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project shifted from aiming for larger target program participant numbers, to delivering awareness and education sessions to the broader network and organisations. This meant that the program team remained committed to providing participants with education opportunities, delivering the SL&RR program to small groups across Gippsland whilst connecting with individuals and networks through additional information sessions, Café Catch-Ups, and network meetings.

When exploring outcomes for Phase 2 of the project, quantitative data gathered for the project reach and impact suggested that there was a significant increase in numerical outputs in the information sessions/workshops/Café Catch-Ups facilitated, and a modest increase in the number of program participants invovled in the SL&RR program:

- The total number of the SL&RR program participants rose from 30 in Phase 1, to 44 in Phase 2.
- The combined number of participants attending Café Catch-Up events and information sessions went from 479 people in Phase 1, to 869 people in Phase 2.

The Program Developer discussed how the SL&RR program had evolved over the years of operation, reflecting on how, and where it started, to where it was now. The developer could see the immense changes that had occurred in all staff involved, including the Peer Educators and themselves, plus how the focus of the program delivery had evolved during this time.

The program reach data demonstrated that although it may not have reached the total number of People with Intellectual Disability originally targeted, the reach of the program to a wider network was achieved to a much higher degree. This increased reach may have been equal to, if not more beneficial to running small program numbers, as it ensured the program message was shared more widely, reducing biases, increasing education and awareness of networks and ensured more People with Intellectual Disability had information and access to the program if they chose to participate. Furthermore, data gathered through interviews with GCASA staff and Peer Educators demonstrated that running smaller programs with fewer participants was more feasible, allowing them time to better engage with their participants, and encouraged greater discussion and networking amongst smaller numbers.

Impacts, outcomes, and process learnings for SL&RR Peer Educators

Subsection 7.2 and 7.3 of this report, *"Thematic analysis of Peer Educators"* elaborates on the measurable impact and outcomes of the SL&RR program through the experiences of the Peer Educators. In these subsections, Theme 4, *"Value of being a peer educator,"* in the 2023 data, and Theme 2, *"Having a voice and being heard,"* in the 2024 data, provide essential evidence of the program's positive outcomes on Peer Educators.

Outlined in the theme *"Value of being a peer educator",* the Peer Educators discussed their happiness and enjoyment in teaching participants with intellectual disabilities, and their feeling supported in their roles. Their subjective feeling of contribution to the community of people with intellectual disabilities through this Peer Educator role motivated them to continue this work in the future. In seeing the numerous benefits of being a Peer Educator in the SL&RR program, they encouraged other people with a lived experience to also take up the role. Their motivating comments for any new Peer Educators were around *"be yourself"*, *"don't be afraid, just speak up"*, and that they would be *"surrounded by some amazing people"* in the program.

The 2024 data from the Peer Educators emphasised the importance of *"Having a voice and being heard,"* which was essential for themselves and the program participants with intellectual disabilities. They achieved this by participating in delivering program sessions, which created an empowering environment for the participants to have their voices heard. The ability of self-advocacy Peer Educators gained through program facilitation was transferable beyond the program.

The program's empowering effect was not only for the Peer Educators but also for the program participants with intellectual disabilities. One peer educator explained that this empowering effect for the program participants extended beyond the education session setting to the real world in the disability service support sector. Seeing all the benefits of the SL&RR program, the Peer Educators hoped that it should be expanded to reach more people with intellectual disabilities.

Impacts, outcomes, and process learnings for stakeholder participants of the SL&RR program

Section 6.2 of this report, "Feedback from stakeholder participants" discussed the impact and outcomes of the SL&RR program on a broader network of organisations working in the disability service sector. In total, 58 respondents participated and completed the feedback survey questionnaire. A total of 80% of the participants who completed the survey questionnaire felt "Very happy" or "Happy" with the program delivery.

In the SL&RR program feedback survey, stakeholder participants were asked "*what are the three most important things you learnt today?",* providing open-ended responses to this question. Results generated that stakeholders' awareness of programs, support and/or resources for young people and people with disabilities and/or experiencing sexual assault was one of the most important things they learnt from the program. As one participant stated, "[It was] *resources for practitioners working with individuals experiencing sexual violence*". Another said, "[It was] *programs and "resources that I didn't know existed*". One participant stated, "[It was] *services for disabilities and sexual assault*".

Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of lived experience stories within the program. For instance, one respondent stated, "*lived experiences provide real-life examples for practitioners to learn from*". Other respondents acknowledged that "*having Peer Educators with lived experience is really important*", another valued "*hearing from peer support and lived experience grateful for their stories and sharing*".

Survey responses from stakeholders demonstrated increased understanding of sexual lives and respectful relationships of their clients from participating in the program, realising that the program content was vital to support their program participant clients. Responses suggested that stakeholders learnt from program resources and were motivated to provide sustainable support that was safe and inclusive. Furthermore, findings suggested that a gap was evident in the current knowledge stakeholders held in regard to content delivered in the SL&RR program, outlining the need for greater information sharing, transparency and education to be provided in this space.

Impacts, outcomes, and process learnings for staff of the SL&RR program

During the April 2024 reflection workshop, GCASA staff and Peer Educators were asked to reflect on the project journey to date and consider how the project had evolved and was moving forward. A key part of this workshop was discussions centred around how the program could be adapted and expanded in future, and what considerations needed to be made for this to potentially occur. Drawing on their experience running the SL&RR program, the workshop participants outlined several key recommendations for any future similar programs. These recommendations centred around ensuring a participant-centred approach for all program delivery.

Within the participant centred approach to SL&RR program delivery, workshop participants highlighted the importance of assessing a participants' "readiness" to undertake the program. This included assessing their capacity to understand new information, preferred learning style, level of intellectual ability, and best individual supportive measures if participants were to become distressed. Furthermore, when facilitating meaningful engagement and learning, workshop participants outlined the importance of ensuring program delivery was not tokenistic, and that sexual health education was tailored to the needs of the community they were serving.

Creating a safe space for learning and growth was outlined as essential in program delivery, ensuring all program delivery was trauma informed. Workshop participants discussed the importance of creating a safe space for participants to express their views, experiences, and ideas, whilst always maintaining respectful boundaries and communication. Another consideration was the exclusion of people with personal relationships (carers and family) from the program delivery to minimise discomfort and a potentially coercive environment. Follow up post SL&RR program was also demonstrated as a potential future consideration, ensuring past participants were still supported, remained connected to their peers, and knew when and how to access support if required.

The final future consideration from workshop participants was supporting the continued involvement of Peer Educators in delivery of the SL&RR program. Participants highlighted the importance of Peer Educator lived experience in program delivery, providing a supportive link for program participants to feel seen and understood in their capacity and learning. It was identified that Peer Educators should have access to debriefing opportunities post-program, and considerations must be made to their capacity, feelings, and exposure to triggering content. Encouraging active listening of Peer Educators in the program delivery space was also outlined as important to improve emotional intelligence, increase understanding and improve communication skills with program Facilitators and participants.

These reflections gathered in workshop sessions demonstrated the depth in which project staff had explored the meaning, impact, and benefit of the SL&RR program on its participants, the Peer Educators and themselves. Furthermore, outlined in a GCASA staff case study captured in interview sessions demonstrated the impact of the SL&RR program on not only participants, but their support network including family, friends, carers, and health care providers.

GCASA staff stated the value of the program for all those involved, demonstrating the importance of sharing the SL&RR program content more widely through networks. Whilst the intended model of program delivery was greater numbers of People with Intellectual Disability and smaller network numbers, outcomes from project participants demonstrates that by reaching a larger audience through networks (information sessions, formal and informal meetings, Café-Catch Ups), this may create greater traction for the project, decrease stigma and biases associated with SL&RR program content, and ultimately increase program participant numbers with reduced barriers for attendance.

2. What challenges were encountered by the project team?

Identified in this report were several challenges encountered by the project team, evidenced primarily in three sets of data: the reflection workshops with the SL&RR program team (including Peer Educators), interviews and focus groups with the Peer Educators, and interviews with the SL&RR program team. During the April 2024 reflections workshop, participants outlined challenges including the tension amongst the team, insufficient support for the program team, limited access to People with an Intellectual Disability, limited use of inclusive language, lack of understanding from people with "authority", and future funding as barriers to their potential success in program delivery.

Challenges in program delivery and content

When discussing the tension amongst the team in program delivery, it was identified that Peer Educators had different capacities, lived experiences, traumas, personalities, and perspectives, which at times created tension. This tension identified during program delivery was further exacerbated by the perceived insufficient support received by the project team, including limited access to additional SL&RR program Facilitators and Counsellors. During interview sessions with the project team and discussing program challenges, the Program Developer highlighted how it could be "*a complex space*" to work in at times. These complexities came in managing various relationships, "*it's just that constant dynamic that changes minute to minute*". They highlighted the need for clearer employment considerations for Peer Educators, "*around safety being the focus of everything. I think there needs to be much clearer parameters around what a peer educator is and does, and around professionalism*":

Project workshop participants discussed the perceived limited accessibility of People with Intellectual Disability to support services. Participants believed that a degree of "gatekeeping" was being witnessed in the program, whereby delivery of the SL&RR program content to People with Intellectual Disability would "*open up too much of a can of worms*" for service providers and/or parents, guardians, and carers. Workshop participants also highlighted the lack of education and limited awareness of the program content and its implications for medical practitioners, health-related providers, and institutions working with women. It was identified that this lack of understanding may have contributed to biases and potential coercive control. During program staff interviews, the Program Developer outlined the challenges they experienced in biases from organisations outside of the program that may have impacted support provided. They discussed the challenges in managing relationships with "*project partners*" and "*network*" members, as there was "*such an imbalance of comprehension and questions and need*". The challenges at times manifested through organisations and/or family "*blocking*" clients from accessing the program. These findings were further confirmed during interview sessions with Peer Educators, who outlined that *"fear of the unknown"* among the parents or carers was identified as one of the primary reasons prohibiting the program to reach out to the participants:

Data gathered from workshop sessions and through project staff interviews outlined concerns with the SL&RR program content, including the potentially outdated, triggering nature of the content, lack of inclusive language and the length and depth of the resources that may have been difficult for program participants with intellectual difficulties to understand. With intellectual property for the SL&RR program still owned by an external organisation, the Program Developer highlighted the ongoing difficulties in amending any program content.

In addition to the program content and appropriate language, educational materials, specifically videos, were highlighted as main contributors to the right pitch for the program. The Peer Educators believed that videos were important for the program, with some suggesting cutting them shorter into *"bite-sized chunks"*.

Challenges in collaboration with project partners

The SR&RR program was a collaborative project between the New Wave Gippsland and the GCASA. Many of the Peer Educators who co-facilitated the SL&RR program with GCASA's staff came from the New Wave Gippsland (NWG). These Peer Educators reflected that the different organisational structures between these two organisations created some challenges for NWG to lead the SL&RR program. The relatively flattened structure of NWG was not conducive to how the SL&RR program was run. It was identified by participants that there was no top-down management leading and/or setting priorities for New Wave Gippsland, meaning that the members were relatively equal and directed priorities with support from project workers.

One participant acknowledged that *"GCASA did the best they could. But New Wave didn't really see it as a priority just because of the key people within New Wave."* New Wave Gippsland permitted some of its members to be Peer Educators of the SL&RR program run by GCASA to meet the program's funding criteria. However, New Wave Gippsland, as a group, distanced themselves from the program. Interviews with Peer Educators suggested that there were some frictions among the members regarding the identities of the New Wave Gippsland: People with intellectual disabilities vs queer

people with intellectual disabilities. This identity tension made some members who did not feel belonging to the New Wave Gippsland leave the group, thus shrinking its membership.

3. What are the perceived benefits to the community by introducing a capacity-building program in Gippsland?

When exploring the perceived benefits to community for the New Wave Capacity Building Project, experiences from participants engaging in the SL&RR program elaborates on how this program positively impacted the lives of community members with an intellectual disability, ABI and/or complex communication. Furthermore, benefits to community are captured in the program network reach and attendance numbers, demonstrating the increased capacity of the program in Phase 2 to reach a broader network.

Perceived benefits to SL&RR program participants

Captured in program participant surveys and interview sessions, participants outlined the impact the program had on them. During interview sessions, participants discussed how they had applied what they had learned in their real-life. Participants involved in the program also outlined that part of learning how to be safe in the SR&RR program was learning *"how to respect other opinions"* (Program Participant). This education surrounding respectful relationships was linked to learning how to debate and argue with one another safely, with being calm as an element of it. Making friends/networking was another positive aspect of the SL&RR program raised by the participants. During interview sessions, they highlighted how they appreciated the opportunity to discuss things and listen to one another, This opportunity enabled the participants to learn from one another.

This story-sharing helped the participants make friends and/or create networking. Interviews with SL&RR program participants further demonstrated the positive impact the program had on their lives and learning outcomes. Learning how to be safe was repeatedly cited as key to the program and expressed by program participants in different ways. Understanding sexual harassment as part of learning how to be safe was well captured in the narratives of participants when asked why they came to this SL&RR program. The participants outlined how some topics covered in this SL&RR program were sometimes challenging, at times making them feel uncomfortable. Nevertheless, the feelings of uncomfortableness were reduced by their participation in the discussions encouraged by the program: The impact of the SL&RR program on People with Intellectual Disability attending the sessions appeared to be high. Reponses gathered through survey and interview sessions demonstrated that program participants greatly valued the content of the program, and believed they could appropriately use this information to educate, advocate for, and protect themselves in a variety of situations. Furthermore, program participants increased their social network, improving their connectedness and potentially their ability to gain more insight from a wider group of peers with lived experiences.

Perceived benefits to the broader Gippsland community

The reach and engagement of Phase 2 of the SL&RR program across Gippsland is represented in report subsection 5.2 *"Reach and Engagement of the SL&RR Program in Phase 2"*. This section demonstrates how Phase 2 of the program was attended in all six LGAs across Gippsland, with significant attendance numbers for the program. Whilst the Latrobe Valley had the greatest number of project attendance,

including information sessions, program delivery sessions, Café-Catch Ups and community outreach, the project team were able to expand the network to cover the major localities of Gippsland.

In Phase 2 of the project, data received from GCASA project staff demonstrated that approximately 913 people were reached, including SL&RR program participants, stakeholders, organisations, network members, current and prospective GCASA staff, health professionals, family members and carers. This growth in reach demonstrated a 36.2% increase in program reach in 2023-2024 compared to 2020-2022.

In actuality, the program did not achieve the participant numbers as projected, however an unexpected outcome of the program was the greater reach that occurred with the professional networks, organisations, caregivers, and families. These networks included the formal and informal communications, including Café Catch-Ups, meetings, outreach sessions and online communications. Regardless of projected versus actual program reach, it was realised that both program participants and network numbers increased in Phase 2 of the project.

9.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a total of six identified recommendations for the New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project. The following recommendations are based on the findings of this report:

1. Continue to **facilitate the SL&RR program through GCASA**, as they are the ideal lead agency to deliver the PREP program.
    a. GCASA as the lead agency encourages a reduction in barriers to support services and increased accessibility for people with an intellectual disability.
    b. GCASA as the lead agency reduces the barriers to the knowledge, and support services and has experience in supporting and employing people with intellectual disability.
    c. GCASA has the most appropriate organisation structure and capacity to sustainably implement, facilitate, and evaluate program delivery and outcomes.
2. Consider **rebranding and revising the SL&RR program**. This rebranding and revision should be done in a collaboration with GCASA program staff and the Peer Educators, drawing on all relevant data sets in this evaluation.
    a. Develop a more appropriate name for the program to increase transparency about program content and reduce the concern held by some parents/guardians/carers of people with intellectual disabilities.
    b. Revise program resources such as videos and workbook, removing outdated language and content, improving accessibility for diverse people with intellectual disabilities, and update to be inclusive of LGBTQIA+ people with intellectual disabilities.
    c. Ensure the right balance between focusing on abusive and healthy relationships in videos and workbooks is achieved to lessen triggers that the content may cause.
3. Continue **delivering the SL&RR program using a collaborative approach between GCASA staff and Peer Educators.**
    a. The lived experience of Peer Educators is valued by program participants and provides a supportive bridge between participants, content, and program Facilitators.

b. Provide support and training for Peer Educators to continue their professional development in a variety of areas such as self-advocacy, self-regulation, emotional intelligence, and group facilitation.

c. Ensure a counsellor advocate/ person with a similar role is included in program delivery to support Peer Educators, program participants and facilitating staff.

d. Continue to find appropriate ways of engaging New Wave Gippsland as a group involved in the SL&RR program.

4. Provide ongoing **support and training for all SL&RR program staff.**

a. Ensure a GCASA contractor/support person is present at each program and senior to support the Facilitator, Peer Educators, and participants. Ensure they are available to manage upsets and provide a wraparound service.

b. Include trauma awareness support and training for all staff including supervision, and professional development, pre-planning, debriefing and other support systems in place.

c. Encourage people awareness including understanding behaviours, self-exploration, decreasing exposures, and decreasing vicarious trauma. Improve self-development and awareness, self-regulation (respond versus react).

d. Continue providing professional development to the program facilitating team, including Peer Educators, and support them to perform their roles more effectively and, at the same time, to manage their own trauma.

5. Continue to **work with key stakeholders/ agencies towards a shared vision and mission** and **build program awareness and reach.**

a. Maintain and share more widely the program message of "*nothing about us, without us".*

b. Decrease working silos, increase information between program, LGAs and supporting organisations. Networks can create relationships which then enable other activities to take place e.g., program delivery, sharing of knowledge, informal personal development, and referrals.

c. Explore ways to raise awareness and/or provide education sessions to people in "authority" to enhance inclusivity in services and support relevant to people with intellectual disabilities.

d. Provide public awareness campaigns, including attendance at events, conferences, communities of practice, AGMs, and exhibitions.

e. Continue to use the Café-Catch Up sessions as a networking opportunity and use a vehicle for information delivery. These sessions should include sharing goals and aims of the program, introductions to GCASA and PREP program, and include "tasters" of the program.

6. Continue to **deliver the SL&RR program to small groups** across Gippsland, **maintaining a 'participant centered approach'**.

a. Ensure "participant readiniess" to engage in the program is determined prior to enrollment included assessing participants' capacity to understand new information, preferred learning style, level of intellectual ability, and best individual supportive measures if participants were to become distressed.

b. Facilitate meaningful engagement and learning, ensuring program delivery is not tokenistic, and that sexual health education was tailored to the needs of participants.

c. Continue to create a safe space for learning and growth, ensuring all program delivery is trauma informed. Facilitate a safe space for participants to express their views, experiences, and ideas, whilst always maintaining respectful boundaries and communication.

d. Provide follow up post SL&RR program through networking sessions (Café-Catch Ups, outreach etc.) ensuring past participants are still supported, connected to their peers, and know when and how to access support if required.

e. Continue to facilitate the program with Peer Educators as the supportive link for program participants to feel seen and understood in their capacity and learning.

10. LIMITATIONS

There were several limitations related to this evaluation that must be considered. These include:

1. Small numbers of participants involved in the SL&RR program, impacting the overall number of participants available for interview as part of the project evaluation. Despite this, the CERC attended all available SL&RR programs delivered, gathering all available data.

2. It was evident that New Wave were disengaged with the project, with only small numbers from the organisation directly involved in contributing to, delivery of, and success of the program despite attempts of project staff to inform New Wave of the progress of the program.

3. Having a broad program population with an intellectual disability, ABI, and LGBTQIA+ people with an intellectual disability resulted in varying degrees of contribution from participants to focus group discussion and survey responses for the project. All attempts were made to accommodation diverse communication styles and abilities of participants.

4. Diversity of program geographic location across Gippsland restricted the CERC evaluation staff's ability to attend all Café Catch-up and outreach sessions included in the program. Despite this, significant data were gathered in all events that could be attended.

Despite these limitations, the evaluation is considered to present a credible assessment of the project.

11. METHODOLOGY

11.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The approach of the CERC to this evaluation was informed by a Participatory Evaluation and Co-Design Framework.

Participatory evaluation

A participatory evaluation framework puts people from the community and those delivering the programs, projects and services at the centre of the evaluation. Participatory evaluation is a distinctive approach based on the following principles:

- That evaluation should be a co-designed, collaborative partnership through 360° stakeholder input, including project participants and project funders;
- That integral to evaluation is an evaluation capacity-building focus within and across projects;
- That evaluation is a cyclical and iterative process embedded in projects from project design to program assessment;
- That evaluation adopts a learning, improvement and strengths-based approach;
- That evaluation supports innovation, accepting that projects will learn and evolve'
- That evaluation contributes to the creation of a culture of evaluation and evaluative thinking;
- That there is no one or preferred data collection method rather the most appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods will be tailored to the information needs of each project.

Co-design

Co-design is a process and approach that is about working with people to create 'interventions, services and programs which will work in the context of their lives and will reflect their own values and goals'[1]. Co-design can be done in many ways but is about collaborative engagement that is bottom-up, creative, and enables a wide range of people to participate and, importantly, steer decisions and outcomes. Co-design is not a consultation process but a partnership approach where 'end-users' actively define and shape strategies and outcomes. The role of the 'expert' is to facilitate this process.

11.2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the project utilised a variety of data collection tools in a mixed methods approach, providing information about the process, outcomes, impact, and capacity building. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed as described below.

Quantitative data

Program data, including session attendance, Café Catch-Up events, and information sessions/presentations, were collected. A survey was developed and distributed to those who attended sessions and events.

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[1] VCOSS (2015). Walk alongside: *Co-designing social initiatives with people experiencing vulnerabilities*. V. C. o. S. Service. Melbourne.

Qualitative data

Semi-structured individual interviews were held with NWG and GCASA project team members and the Peer Educators. Focus groups were conducted with both the Peer Educators and program participants.

Semi-structured individual interview and focus group questions were designed to guide the researcher to capture all desired information while providing flexibility for the participants to elaborate on their experience.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis technique was used for the qualitative data with findings presented under theme headings together with participant quotes. The thematic analysis utilised Braun and Clarke's six-step process, which included familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes and producing the report (Figure 34)[2].

Step 1	• Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down identical ideas
Step 2	• Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code
Step 3	• Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all relevant data to each potential theme
Step 4	• Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis
Step 5	• Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme
Step 6	• The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

Figure 36: Six-Step Thematic Analysis

As qualitative analysis is an inductive process, some interpretation of the data was required to create the thematic map. It was actively acknowledged that the researcher's interpretations would inform the results of this study. Hence, any prior conceptions of the topic were reflexively bracketed to the best of the researcher's abilities[3].

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[2] Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2022) *Thematic analysis: a practical guide*. SAGE Publications Ltd

[3] Berger, R. (2013). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. Qualitative Research, 15(2), 219-234. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475.

12. ETHICAL APPROVAL AND PRACTICE

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Federation University aims to promote and support responsible research practices by providing resources and guidance to our researchers. We aim to maintain a strong research culture which incorporates:

- Honesty and integrity;

- Respect for human research participants, animals and the environment;

- Respect for the resources used to conduct research;

- Appropriate acknowledgement of contributors to research; and

- Responsible communication of research findings.

Human Research and Ethics applications, *Evaluation of the New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project* was approved by the Federation University Human Research Ethics Committee (2023-160) (Appendix 2) prior to data collection and analysis. Consent to participate in the study and for participant's de-identified transcripts to be used for research and evaluative purposes was obtained via signed informed consent forms before commencing the interviews. Participant anonymity was maintained by removing any identifiable information from the evaluation.

13. ABBREVIATIONS

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ABI	Acquired Brain Injury
CERC	Collaborative Evaluation and Research Group
CoP	Community of Practice
CASA	Centre Against Sexual Assault
GCASA	Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault
GDAI	Gippsland Disability Advocacy Inc
GWH	Gippsland Women's Health
ICB	Individual Capacity Building
LCHS	Latrobe Community Health Service
LGA	Local Government Authority
LRH	Latrobe Regional Hospital
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queers, Asexual, Plus
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NWG	New Wave Gippsland

OCB	Organisation Capacity Building
PREP	Peer Relationship Education Partners
SASVic	Sexual Assault Service Victoria
SL&RR	Sexual Lives and Respectful Relationships
PWD	People with Disabilities
IEC	Information Education and Communications
PWID	People with Intellectual Disabilities
EAP	Employee Assistance Program
ARUMA	Aruma Disability Services
AGM	Annual General Meeting

14. LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

FIGURES

TABLES

15. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Human Research and Ethics Approval

Principal Researcher:	Professor Joanne Porter
Co-Researcher/s:	Dr Daria Soldatenko Megan Simic Nicole Coombs Elizabeth Miller Dr Sambath My Luis Antonio T. Hualda
School/Section:	**Collaborative Evaluation and Research Centre (CERC)**
Project Number:	**2023-160**
Project Title:	**Evaluation of the New Wave Gippsland Capacity Building Project.**
For the period:	28/09/2023 **to** 28/09/2028

Quote the Project No: 2023-160 in all correspondence regarding this application.

Approval has been granted to undertake this project in accordance with the proposal submitted for the period listed above.

<u>Please note</u>: It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure the Ethics Office is contacted immediately regarding any proposed change or any serious or unexpected adverse effect on participants during the life of this project.

<u>In Addition:</u> Maintaining Ethics Approval is contingent upon adherence to all Standard Conditions of Approval as listed on the final page of this notification.

COMPLIANCE REPORTING DATES TO HREC:

<u>Annual project report:</u>
28 September 2024
28 September 2025
28 September 2026
28 September 2027

<u>Final project report:</u>
28 October 2028

The combined annual/final report template is available at:
HREC Forms

Fiona Koop
Coordinator, Research Ethics
28 September 2023

STANDARD CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

1. Conduct the project strictly in accordance with the proposal submitted and granted ethics approval, including any amendments made to the proposal required by the HREC.

2. Advise (email: research.ethics@federation.edu.au) immediately of any complaints or other issues in relation to the project which may warrant review of the ethical approval of the project.

3. Where approval has been given subject to the submission of copies of documents such as letters of support or approvals from third parties, these are to be provided to the Ethics Office prior to research commencing at each relevant location.

Submission for approval of amendments to the approved project before implementing such changes. A combined amendment template covering the following is available on the HRE website: https://federation.edu.au/research/support-for-students-and-staff/ethics/human-ethics/human-ethics3

- - Request for Amendments
- - Request for Extension. Note: Extensions cannot be granted retrospectively.
- - Changes to Personnel

4. Annual Progress reports on the anniversary of the approval date and a Final report within a month of completion of the project are to be submitted by the due date each year for the project to have continuing approval.

5. If, for any reason, the project does not proceed or is discontinued, advise the Committee by completing the Final report form.

6. Notify the Ethics Office of any changes in contact details, including address, phone number and email address for any member of the research team.

7. The HREC may conduct random audits and / or require additional reports concerning the research project as part of the requirements for monitoring, as set out in the National statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

Failure to comply with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* 2007 (Updated 2018) and with the conditions of approval will result in suspension or withdrawal of approval.